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**Teaching British Imperial History to Children in English Secondary Schools, c.1965-1995**

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# Abstract

The following thesis examines the ways in which the history of empire was taught in late twentieth century English secondary schools. In the immediate post-war years, imperial history occupied a stable but supporting role in the national narrative. From the 1960s onwards, developments in and beyond the classroom pushed imperial history further towards the margins of school curricula. However, the influence of imperial(ist) ideological frameworks persisted. I argue that resistance and contestation created moments of slippage where more radical histories of British imperialism can be glimpsed. Even in the absence of conscious rebellion, the individual subjectivity of schoolchildren meant that the education given was rarely the education received. As such, this thesis views education as a process, rather than a product. While I draw upon teaching materials destined for use in twentieth century classrooms, I also tackle the harder-to-access areas of teaching practice and its reception.

Overall, my work makes three key interventions. It demonstrates the impact of a national culture of ‘postcolonial melancholia’ on teaching and learning in mid-to late-twentieth century Britain. Secondly, it helps to reconceptualise education as a multidirectional process: not only the teacher, but also students, their families, and their communities are demonstrated to be significant actors. This is emphasis is most prominent in my third Chapter. Third, it serves as a powerful reminder that what history we choose to teach matters to students, especially those who are downwardly racialised.

# Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University’s Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means ([www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means)). This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

# Acknowledgements

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My gratitude is due to the staff of the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre and Education Trust, who welcomed me as part of their team for three months during my PhD. I was privileged to be part of your important work of documenting and preserving Greater Manchester’s rich anti-racist history, however briefly. The Centre’s collections exerted a formative influence on the third chapter of this thesis. More importantly, its work confirms the arguments made by many of the anti-racist and anti-imperial organisers I quote therein: understanding our own history provides a vital foundation for present and future resistance.

I feel fortunate to have enjoyed many chance or casual conversations which have influenced the writing of this thesis. In particular, I wish to thank Julie Pearn, who discussed her own experiences and kindly sent me a copy of her work (co-authored with Maushumi Roy) on *E.R.A. and the Black Child in Secondary School*. Sheffield is a city in which traditions of resistance are alive and well, and I am grateful for the knowledge and memories which neighbours, fellow-campaigners, and virtual strangers have shared with me over the half decade I have lived here.

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# Abbreviations

A Level – Advanced Level

ACD – Association for Curriculum Development

ACER – Afro-Caribbean Education Resource Project

AEB – Associated Examining Board

AFFOR – All Faiths for One Race

ALTARF – All London Teachers Against Racism and Fascism

AMA – Assistant Masters Association

AT – Attainment Target

BBC – British Broadcasting Association

BEM – Black Education Movement

CHTTG – Cambridge History Teaching Today Group

CPS - Centre for Policy Studies

CRE – Commission for Racial Equality

CSE – Certificate of Secondary Education

CUP – Cambridge University Press

DES – Department of Education and Science

ERA – Education Reform Act, 1988

ESN – Educationally Sub-normal

GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education

GLC – Greater London Council

GPI – George Padmore Institute

HAG – History Advisory Group

HAT – Human Awareness Training

HC – House of Commons

HCA – History Curriculum Association

HiEP - History in Education Project

HL – House of Lords

HMSO – Her Majesty’s Stationery Office

HSU – History Study Unit

HTG – History Task Group

HWG – History Working Group

IHR – Institute of Historical Research

ILO – International Labour Organisation

IoE – Institute of Education

IOLR – India Office Library and Records

IQ – Intelligence Quotient

IRR – Institute of Race Relations

KS – Key Stage

LEA – Local Education Authority

LAEG – London Auschwitz Education Group

LHTA – London History Teachers’ Association

LMA – London Metropolitan Archives

MoE – Ministry of Education

MP – Member of Parliament

MUP – Manchester University Press

MWS – Modern World Studies

MWSD – Modern World Studies Diary

NAL – National Archives, London

NAME – National Association for Multi-Racial Education

NASUWT – National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers

NCC – National Curriculum Council

NUS – National Union of Students

NUT – National Union of Teachers

NWSSEB – North Western Secondary Schools Examination Board

O Level – Ordinary Level

OCR – Oxford, Cambridge, and Royal Society of Arts Examinations Board

OFSTED – Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills

OUP – Oxford University Press

PACE – Parental Alliance for Choice in Education

PGWG – Parliamentary Group for World Government

RAPU – Racism Awareness Programme Unit

RAT – Racism Awareness Training

SAT - Standard Assessment Tests

SCAA – School Curriculum and Assessment Authority

SCHP – Schools Council History Project

SDEC – Sheffield Development Education Centre

SDHSU – School Designed History Study Units

SDT – School Designed Themes

SEAC – School Examinations Assessment Council

SESC – ‘Secondary Education and Social Change in the United Kingdom since 1945’

SOAS – School of Oriental and African Studies

TAR – Teachers Against Racism

TES – *Times Educational Supplement*

TV – Television

UCLES – University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate

UN – United Nations

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WCC – World Council of Churches

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# A Note on Terminology

This thesis explores various concepts of 'b/Blackness'. For ease of understanding, I will use the term ‘Black’ (capitalised) to refer exclusively to an identity claimed by individuals of African, African-Caribbean, or African American heritage. The term ‘black’ (uncapitalised) will be used to refer to notions of ‘political blackness’. Political blackness was a popular organising tool of anti-racist resistance in late twentieth century Britain, which stressed common cause between all those who were downwardly racialised. In practice, concepts of political blackness tended primarily to encompass individuals of African-Caribbean, African, and South Asian heritage.

Both terms – ‘Black’ and ‘black’ – will be used only where these identities were claimed by the individuals and movements under study. In cases where there is room for doubt, further clarification will be supplied in text.

I always try to identify individuals and movements as they identify themselves. However, my sources do not always supply their own descriptors. Furthermore, I sometimes need to refer to all those who experience downward racialisation as a broad category. In these cases, the term ‘people of colour’ and its variants (e.g. communities of colour; students of colour) will be used. I have opted for this descriptor in part because it is in common contemporary usage and hence readily understood. It is an expansive category which facilitates discussion of the commonalities of experiences of racism without risk of confusion or elision (accusations which can justifiably be levelled at the use of a category of political blackness in today’s world).

# Introduction

*If history is an arena for the projection of ideal selves, it can also be a means of undoing and questioning them, offering more disturbing accounts of who we are and where we come from than simple identifications would suggest*.[[1]](#footnote-2) **Raphael Samuel, 1990.**

*In England, as in other civilised countries, it has been the general feeling over the centuries that to ignore the experience of the past is not merely folly but a sort of impiety*.[[2]](#footnote-3) **Ministry of Education, 1962.**

Recent years have been marked by fierce debate over the role that the British Empire played in structuring our present realities – and on the way this history should be represented. As important tools in the (de)construction of national self-understanding, school and university curricula are often placed at the heart of this controversy. Catriona McDermid and Stuart Foster describe such debates as ‘impoverished’ by an emphasis on ‘what advocates insist *should* be taught, or what they assume *has* been taught rather than on any understanding of what *is* or *was* taught in history classrooms’.[[3]](#footnote-4) McDermid and Foster identify their own work, on comparative portrayals of the British empire in history textbooks, as a means of bridging this gap. My thesis makes a similar contribution. It presents an evidence-based understanding of the ways in which the history of empire has been taught (or, more frequently, marginalised) and how such teaching has been contested. My research helps to illuminate how a mid to late twentieth century culture of imperial forgetting has paved the way for today’s imperial revival. It also contextualises present-day movements for curricular ‘decolonisation’ and resistance against the interlinked currents of imperial erasure and imperialist celebration. Demands for much-needed educational change can only be strengthened with reference to a historical context which has sometimes been poorly understood or misrepresented.

The following thesis will examine the permeation of imperial(ist) historical frameworks into school history curricula. It will argue that the logic of history as imperial justification remained a powerful force in English secondary schools throughout the twentieth century, although the formal teaching of empire was often pushed to the sidelines. My work is part of a growing movement to face up to the nature of empire as one of the driving forces of our present reality, rather than treating it as a ‘history apart’.[[4]](#footnote-5) The present interest in imperial history, which has become an especially powerful cultural current since the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests of 2020, is an attempt to grapple with its enduring influence on public life and national identity. Both this work, and the controversy which it inevitably attracts, are themselves evidence of what T. W. Nechtman describes as the ‘unhappy imbrication’ of nation and empire.[[5]](#footnote-6)

When I embarked upon this project, many of those with whom I spoke held two preconceptions about the teaching of imperial history in twentieth century English schools:

1.) The assumption that imperial history occupied a significant role in English schools, where it was taught with an unquestioningly patriotic focus; students were moulded to experience pride in the maps showing that ‘the pink bits are British’.[[6]](#footnote-7)

2.) The assumption that teaching changed substantially over the course of the twentieth century, taking an increasingly critical approach to empire and imperialism. These changes can be viewed with either hostility or pride, depending on the listener. For those in the latter category, there is a tendency to apply a model of linear, progressive improvement – a historical sensibility which is itself derived from imperial justification and is often assumed in commentary on race and empire.[[7]](#footnote-8)

Neither assumption is correct. Of course, aspects of the imperial experience *were* celebrated in twentieth century history classrooms. In the early post-war years, the history of empire and of Commonwealth occupied a stable – if relatively marginal – place on school curricula. Its narration tended towards English self-congratulation. From the 1960s onwards, however, there seems to have been a growing reluctance to teach imperial and Commonwealth history, effected by the quest for ‘relevance’ and the negative association of imperial and *imperialist* history. For much of the remainder of the twentieth century, empire was a quiet (sometimes altogether silent) presence, pushed further to the periphery of historical analysis. Stuart Ward has challenged the received wisdom that an absence of knowledge of empire in metropolitan Britain necessarily implied an absence of interest.[[8]](#footnote-9) I take this analysis one step further. It is my contention that a popular ignorance of empire in fact *feeds imperial sensibilities*. The quiet, marginal presence of empire in the school curricula of the latter half of the twentieth century allowed an imperial mythos, product of an old school of imperial history, to survive unexamined and unchecked.

**Empire’s Great Vanishing Act**

Lawrence J. Butler has characterised the years 1960 to 1964 as an intense period of ‘imperial retreat’.[[9]](#footnote-10) During this time, a grand total of 17 colonies became independent; indeed, the majority of colonies remaining within the British empire had won independence by 1964. Formal decolonisation did not occur without opposition and resistance from the British state. However, the same period witnessed a profound ‘readjustment’ to the new reality within Westminster and Whitehall.[[10]](#footnote-11) In this sense, as John MacKenzie notes, the implosion of empire from 1959 to 1964 was ‘more important in cultural terms’ than imperial losses which followed the Second World War.[[11]](#footnote-12) Fierce anti-colonial struggles applied pressure to the metropole – not least in an economic sense. To impose imperial rule by force required the mobilisation of resources that Britain was increasingly unwilling – or unable – to spare. As Butler writes, the ‘cost savings inherent in decolonization’ played an important role in constructing bipartisan consensus in favour of retreat, ‘approved by the right because it implied cuts in public expenditure, and by the left because it might free money for domestic social spending’.[[12]](#footnote-13)

No career was more emblematic of the shifting consensus than that of the long-term Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) Enoch Powell, who had once dreamed of becoming Viceroy of India. Powell recalled Indian independence as a moment of profound psychological crisis, in which old certainties were unsettled.[[13]](#footnote-14) Nevertheless, his electoral address upon becoming an MP three years later invoked a continued belief in the centrality of empire to British national identity. Without the empire, Powell asserted, ‘Britain would be like a head without a body’.[[14]](#footnote-15) Just a decade later, his position had pivoted dramatically. From the early 1960s, Powell was insistent that the British empire had never truly existed – a piece of rhetorical wizardry which relied on John Robert Seeley’s traditional disavowal of British imperialism as an intentional practice, and through which the country was believed to have ‘conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind’.[[15]](#footnote-16) For Powell, empire was a distraction from Britain’s true destiny as an island nation, characterised by a uniquely rich constitutional tradition, which had endured ‘unbroken’ over the course of centuries. As such, he urged his fellow politicians to jettison the dead-weight of empire and turn their attention inwards. This implied the abandonment of empire and related systems of government and international influence – including the Commonwealth.

The ‘British Commonwealth of Nations’, or the ‘British Commonwealth’, had its origins in empire and the ideology of race. Wendy Webster notes the term was used ambiguously and inconsistently: the ‘British Commonwealth’ was occasionally treated as interchangeable with empire, but usually denoted a ‘racial community of Britons in the self-governing Dominions’ (a category which, under the Treaty of Westminster, included Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Ireland, and Newfoundland).[[16]](#footnote-17) The ‘British Commonwealth’ was dramatically reconceived in the years following the Second World War. Upon independence, India, Pakistan, and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) all became self-governing Dominions and joined the Commonwealth – undermining its traditional, racialised constitution. The London Declaration of 1949 recognised the new status quo. Commonwealth membership no longer entailed acceptance of the British monarch as head of state, in recognition of Indian republicanism.[[17]](#footnote-18) The ‘Commonwealth of Nations’ (‘the Commonwealth) hereafter superseded the ‘British Commonwealth’. It was established as a ‘free and equal’ international community, enshrining principles of ‘modernity, democracy, and freedom’. Most member states were current or former British colonies.

The reconstituted Commonwealth was offered as a solution to the problem of Britain’s role in the era of colonial self-assertion and decolonisation. As the American Secretary of State Dean Acheson suggested, the loss of imperial power required the country to take on a new role.[[18]](#footnote-19) The Commonwealth was positioned as the successor to the aims and aspirations of the British empire. Much as Indian independence had been interpreted as the culmination of the British mission, the desire of former colonies to join in free association with the metropole was treated as proof and vindication of the imperial project. As David Cannadine put it, the ends of the British empire were now portrayed ‘as the whole *point* of the British empire [emphasis in original]’.[[19]](#footnote-20)

The Commonwealth served to prop up Britain’s international status (and self-perception) as a world power when the material support for this position was rapidly dissipating. Somewhat contradictorily, attempts were also made to distinguish it from ‘the Empires of the past’.[[20]](#footnote-21) In one of the Commonwealth’s most famous formulations, Queen Elizabeth II described it as ‘an entirely new conception – built on the highest qualities of the Spirit of Man: friendship, loyalty, and the desire for freedom and peace’.[[21]](#footnote-22) Such rhetoric did little to divest the Commonwealth of its underlying association with empire. Even if the modern Commonwealth was not *intended* as a neo-colonial endeavour, it must certainly be read as an outgrowth of imperial historical consciousness.[[22]](#footnote-23)

The Commonwealth was one of many proposed solutions to the problem of Britain’s post-war position. Politicians treated it in conjunction with – and occasionally as a rival to – reorientation towards Washington and Europe. A third, more isolationist position, was articulated by Powell. Unsurprisingly, his rejection of the global entanglement of empire and Commonwealth carried a racist subtext. Until 1971, citizens of Commonwealth nations held the legal status of ‘British subjects’.[[23]](#footnote-24) Additionally, there existed a strong identification with a British national identity forged by colonisation – especially in the Caribbean. By denying the existence of empire, Powell deprived post-war immigration from Commonwealth countries of its historical context and political rationale. He viewed the boundary of national identity as coterminous with the physical edges of the British Isles. This boundary was to be enforced by a redefinition of Britain’s borders, intended to facilitate tight immigration control.

Powell’s views were by no means exceptional. They reflected a deeper current in post-war popular culture, described by Webster as an ‘embattled’ sense of Englishness, defined in opposition to empire and Commonwealth.[[24]](#footnote-25) Metropolitan coverage of anti-colonial independence movements depicted them as threats to the noble but fragile ‘little England’ constructed by settlers and administrators in inhospitable foreign climes. The same language was applied to the metropole itself, where Commonwealth immigration was increasingly believed to pose a threat to the White national community. A distinction was drawn here between the ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Commonwealth – migrants from the latter category, which comprised downwardly racialised nations which had won independence since 1945, were singled out for resentment. Those who travelled to the British Isles in the wake of the Second World War (sometimes called the ‘Windrush generation’) were frequently shocked by the hostile reception they received in a country which had called for their labour, and which they sometimes viewed as the ‘Motherland’.[[25]](#footnote-26) The domestication of English identity denied the nation’s colonial past and rejected its legacies in the present.[[26]](#footnote-27) Nevertheless, a tacit understanding of the imperial dimension of post-war migration was implied by the common descriptor of ‘reverse colonisation’ – a phrase which betrayed anger and resentment at perceived national decline, and at the sudden need to accommodate those condemned as inferior by the racial codes of empire.[[27]](#footnote-28)

The emergent narrative of ‘embattled Englishness’ was supported with reference to the Second World War. The contributions of colonial troops to Allied victory were systematically excised from popular historical consciousness in the years following the War: a process which culminated in the 1965 state funeral of Winston Churchill, wartime Prime Minister and former colonial administrator. As Webster observes, the ‘insistent identification of 1940 as Churchill’s “finest hour” celebrated the courage of a nation, personified by Churchill, that had stood alone’.[[28]](#footnote-29) Ironically, the state funeral also revealed the transposition of the values and of imperial masculinity onto the War era. Churchill’s life was written in the mould of the public-school ‘officer hero’. The romance and adventure of empire, in decline since the close of the nineteenth century and ‘buried in the mud of Flanders Field’, was reborn in a new theatre.[[29]](#footnote-30)

Paul Gilroy has described how a national preoccupation with the Second World War acts as an escape valve for the complex mix of emotions he describes as ‘postcolonial melancholia’.[[30]](#footnote-31) The war figures as a moment of ‘uncomplicated moral architecture’ – a straightforward battle of good versus evil – in which Britain can be celebrated as a conquering power without the guilt attached to remembrance and legacy of empire. By claiming the war as the climax of the national narrative of constant, teleological progress towards self-betterment, this vision of the past rendered post-war events (loss of empire; economic decline; mass migration) unhistorical. Embrace of the war allowed British people to forget the empire without losing any of its psychological gifts. To use Gilroy’s conceptual framework, later refigured by the historian Peter Mitchell, Churchill’s death was not met with mourning but with melancholy.[[31]](#footnote-32) As formulated by Mitchell, mourning is a process of acceptance of loss, which eventually permits grievers to move on, while melancholy makes that loss ‘the centre of its existence, to the destruction of all else’. For contemporaries, Churchill’s interment meant that no funeral needed to be held for the national spirit – and national greatness – which he was thought to embody.

Thus, the disappearance of empire as a political entity did not entail a sudden abandonment or forgetting of the ideology and logics of imperialism. Richard Drayton has characterised this as a split between ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ decolonisation.[[32]](#footnote-33) The latter term refers to the long struggle against the legacies of colonialism, in recognition of the ‘partial and ambivalent victory’ of formal, political independence. Antoinette Burton’s notion of a ‘pathology of presence’ also provides a useful explanatory framework.[[33]](#footnote-34) Burton observes that (primary) decolonisation engendered a cultural reincarnation and reimagining of empire; the colonial world lived on, in an adulterated, nostalgically romanticised form. This tendency became steadily more prominent the further empire was believed to have retreated into – and become contained by – the past. However, the idea of a ‘pathology of presence’ can be usefully repurposed to describe a divergent cultural trend. As empire disappeared from public consciousness, imperial approaches lived on – even as these lost their original referent and became historically unmoored and/or transposed. Both versions of the pathology of presence featured in mid- to late- twentieth century English culture. However, it is the latter form that I propose dominated the educational arena. Henceforth, unless explicitly stated otherwise, the term ‘pathology of presence’ will be used to refer to this (re)interpretation.

**Pathologies of Presence in the Teaching of Imperial History**

In John Slater’s influential formulation, school history teaching prior to the 1970s was characterised by adherence to the ‘inherited consensus’ of the ‘great tradition’.[[34]](#footnote-35) The ‘great tradition’ comprised both content and practice. History was conceived as a *body* of knowledge to be imparted, rather than a *form* of knowledge (a methodology or practice) with which students could engage.[[35]](#footnote-36) The core of this body of knowledge comprised British history (including the history of empire) narrated as a teleological chronicle. The 1970s is often presented as the turning point at which the ‘great tradition’ came under threat.[[36]](#footnote-37) However, this thesis locates the challenge a decade earlier, when exogenous influences (Britain’s changing world position; the blossoming of ‘Integrated Humanities’ and the social sciences as school disciplines; professional anxieties) forced a reappraisal of history teaching in an attempt to justify the subject’s place on school curricula. The search for a new rationale for history led to two convergent, interlinked trends: the rise of ‘world history’ and the development of the ‘new history’.

World history was introduced into secondary school classrooms from the 1960s onwards. It attempted to offer a historical narrative reflective of the shifting power structures of the post-war world – to use a phrase coined by David Cannadine, Jenny Keating, and Nicola Sheldon, this was ‘history for a nation “in decline”’.[[37]](#footnote-38) In its rush to dethrone Britain as the centre of historical analysis, and to prove itself distinct from the old school of imperial history, world history tended to remain silent on the imperial experience. It was not despite but *because* of this absence, which removed the possibility of critical studies of empire, that world history reaffirmed a distinctly imperial(ist) logic. Thus, the influence of imperial histories on school curricula was frequently indirect, hidden, or inexplicit.

The seeds of the ‘new history’ were sown by the same exogenous forces which had generated world history. However, its rise has often been dated to the early 1970s and the emergence of the highly influential Schools Council History Project (SCHP).[[38]](#footnote-39) SCHP emphasised the teaching of a historical methodology. Factual knowledge was not abandoned, but content was diversified to include local and world history alongside British content. More importantly, SCHP discarded the narrative framework which previously structured taught content; students were instead encouraged to develop critical, sometimes creative approaches to sources and interpretation. Teaching valorised the voices and contributions of students as never before, opening space for the contestation of received knowledge. Methodologically, SCHP exerted an influence which stretched far beyond its formal uptake. However, its success in changing taught content should not be exaggerated. In most schools, world history was added to – but did not supplant or contest – the British, chronological content of the ‘great tradition’.

There are important parallels here with the contemporaneous movements for multi-cultural and anti-racist history teaching. As the 1960s advanced, the children of the post-war generation of Commonwealth migrants began to enter the school system. Their presence invited teachers to question fundamental assumptions regarding the nature and purpose of education. Education for cultural cohesion and a unitary national identity seemed distinctly out of place in a society newly recognised as ‘multi-cultural’ and ‘multi-racial’. The discipline of history holds unique power as a mode of identity formation. Empire, whether as presence of absence, was an important component in the construction of English and British national identity. As we will see, the discipline of history also deeply implicated in the imperial project. Thus, it is unsurprising that historical education was scrutinised and problematised by the movements for ‘multi-cultural’ and ‘anti-racist’ schools. The mainstream of history teaching again proceeded relatively unchanged. However, this was a moment of slippage where more radical histories of British imperialism may be glimpsed.

Such histories were co-produced by teachers, students, communities, and broader cultural and political forces. A study conducted in Slough in 1964described how some people of colour drew upon first-hand or familiar knowledge of colonisation to interpret racialised experiences in the metropole as a legacy of empire.[[39]](#footnote-40) The children of this older generation, often born and raised in England, could draw upon a historical sensibility derived from family and community to construct radical political identities, and to challenge the narratives received in classrooms. Their dissenting voices held an important, if informal, educative function. Even in the absence of conscious rebellion, the individual subjectivity of schoolchildren meant that the education given was rarely the education received; as any teacher will know, teaching and learning are two distinct, if interconnected, processes.

Chapter 3, which addresses these themes, focuses primarily on students from African-Caribbean backgrounds, with an emphasis on experiences in London schools. There were, inevitably, a range of views on and experiences of education within downwardly racialised communities. My decision to stress the history of supplementary education and radical experimentation in a relatively small, geographically contained sample of schools reflects my own understanding of education and its ability to perform anti-colonial work. I share the mode of historical understanding embraced by these movements: history as a socially engaged practice with an orientation towards justice, restitution, and resistance. I also believe that understanding the history of these schools and their philosophies may help to (re)open political possibilities in our present.

The National Curriculum, introduced in 1988, marked a historic departure from the decentralised tradition of English schooling; the legislation was designed to permanently alter the balance of power within state education by transferring decision-making capabilities from teachers to policy makers.[[40]](#footnote-41) Inevitably, the drafting of the National Curriculum opened debates over the meaning of nationhood in late twentieth century England. Once again, history sat at the heart of the controversy. In some respects, the resulting legislation represented a compromise between the great tradition’s chronological overview of the national past (here conceptualised as British rather than English) and the methodological emphasis of the ‘new history’, with occasional nods to a world perspective. Yet this is too simple a reading. The National Curriculum was created in response to the radical historical experiments of the preceding two decades. Its framework technically permitted creative interpretation by teachers. However, the increased burdens placed on the teaching profession effectively removed the space to experiment and strongly disincentivised deviation from the norm. The new era of oversight applied equally to students. Disciplinary pressures disproportionately targeted students of colour. Whether intentionally or not, this militated against the type of educational and historical interventions previously made by such pupils.

The following thesis helps to problematise the dominant terms of existing historiographical debate on the influence of empire in the post-war period. The historiography is polarised between assertions that most Britons were either ignorant of or openly hostile to the empire (the ‘minimal impact thesis’), and claims of a conscious popular allegiance to imperial culture (hereafter termed the ‘maximal impact thesis’).[[41]](#footnote-42) My research implies that popular culture – at least from the 1960s onwards – was certainly not characterised by an uncomplicated celebration of the imperial past. However, evidence of widespread ignorance of empire – whether convincing or not – cannot be equated with indifference. Nor does it serve to support the suggestion that empire exerted a minimal impact upon popular culture. Permeation is distinct from celebration. I argue that the manifestation and construction of ignorance through school curricula both reflected and produced empire’s pathology of presence in mid- to late- twentieth century English culture. In the absence of critical discussion, imperial ideology and assumptions thrived in the shadows.

When these assumptions were challenged, it was often due to the influence of students of colour (whether direct or indirect). My thesis offers a bottom-up view of education: it is a history of people, not of policy. While I draw upon teaching materials destined for use in twentieth century classrooms, I also tackle the harder-to-access areas of teaching practice and its reception. In Chapter 3, this entails an emphasis on the contemporary voices of school students – especially students of colour. As Laura Tisdall notes, histories of education in twentieth century Britain have ‘almost never’ engaged with such voices.[[42]](#footnote-43) Indeed, it has sometimes been assumed that archival records of children of colour – doubly oppressed on the basis of age and race – simply do not exist.[[43]](#footnote-44) There is an element of truth in the idea that historians of this topic may need to be more creative in their search for sources. Nevertheless, to concede to an apparent absence of evidence is to comply with the erasure of these voices from the historical record. In so doing, we make the statement that they are unimportant. In part *because* of their systematic marginalisation by the education system, young people of colour held strong opinions on teaching and learning. History, as a vital means of identity formation and self-knowledge in a hostile society, was a common topic of student criticism and action. The emphasis on these voices in my third Chapter serves two purposes; first, it is a useful reminder that the history we teach matters deeply to students, second, it allows us to reconceptualise the simplistic teacher/student binary, and to appreciate the educational insights provided by those who are too often silenced or maligned in classroom contexts.

My thesis joins students of colour in countering the tendency towards the historical erasure of imperialism. As Gilroy argues, ‘repressed and buried knowledge’ of the cruelty and injustice of colonisation can be denied only at ‘considerable moral and psychological cost’.[[44]](#footnote-45) The cost is felt by all members of society. A refusal to confront the history of empire entails a refusal to confront its legacy; the ‘practical mechanisms of racial hierarchy and the ideology of white supremacy’. It allows migration to be divorced from its proper historical context – as the anti-racist campaigns of the late twentieth century expressed so powerfully, ‘we are here because you were there’.[[45]](#footnote-46) As a corollary, imperial erasure operates as a distorting mirror which allows British people to view themselves as victims of invasion, war, or even a process of ‘reverse colonisation’ through migration. It is only by facing up to the imperial past that we can open the possibility of restitution, justice, and reconciliation – and hence guarantee a shared future.[[46]](#footnote-47) We might then picture discussion of the imperial past as a kind of national talking therapy, which facilitates the concrete changes needed to heal. The alternative, as Peter Mitchell has identified, is the maintenance of empire as an ‘underlying neurosis’, destined to ‘erupt in ever clearer, more frightening, and more cathartic forms’.[[47]](#footnote-48)

**A Note on the Structural Distinctiveness of English Secondary Education**

The origins of English mass education lie in the nineteenth century elementary school system. Elementary schools, so-called for their basic curricular offerings, opened education to poor and working-class children. Funding for these schools typically came from a combination of fees, charitable foundations, and government grants. The latter were often accompanied by rigid criteria. ‘Payment by results’, inaugurated by the Revised Code of 1862, indexed government funding to the attainment of students in the ‘three Rs’ (reading, writing, and arithmetic).[[48]](#footnote-49) This model had the effect of establishing three primary curricular areas, to the exclusion of other subjects. Even amongst the ‘higher branches of elementary instruction’ not included in the Revised Code (history, geography, and grammar), the position and popularity of history seems to have been negligible. Where it existed, it seems to have tended towards rote learning, and to have taken the form of a chronological survey of the English past.

The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed a raft of reforms which created an educational and curricular infrastructure that would endure almost until the century’s end. In 1902, the responsibility for educational administration was transferred from the old network of local ‘School Boards’ to Local Education Authorities (LEAs).[[49]](#footnote-50) Unlike their predecessors, LEAs were given power over secondary education in addition to elementary schools. Two years later, the central Board of Education mandated a secondary curriculum which included history as a compulsory subject. Henceforth, history had a constant place on school curricula at the secondary level – although teachers’ confidence in its position wavered periodically (sometimes with good reason) over the course of the twentieth century. The foundation of the Historical Association (HA) in 1906 was the product of discussions between teachers and academics committed to co-ordinating, improving, and preserving the teaching of history in English schools.[[50]](#footnote-51)

Bernard Porter situates these reforms in the context of a broader nation-building programme; politicians recognised the potential value of history for consolidating national identity and loyalty.[[51]](#footnote-52) Nevertheless, the 1902 Act set the precedent that there would be no ‘official’ history imposed from above – imperial or otherwise. The Act represented a significant shift in power within the English education system: responsibility for curricular matters was transferred from central government to over three hundred newly established LEAs.[[52]](#footnote-53) As Richard Aldrich and Dennis Dean put it, central government would henceforward exert significant control over the *quantity* of history taught in schools, but would be generally unwilling (or unable) to shape the *nature* or *content* of history teaching.[[53]](#footnote-54) The latter was determined in much more diffuse fashion. In practice, History curricula became the prerogative of teachers – acting in dialogue with pressures and influences from higher ups, professional associations, pupils, parents, and broader cultural dynamics.

The 1944 Education Act (the ‘Butler Act’) enshrined the principles of the post-war settlement in the educational field, marking a radical new departure for teachers and students alike.[[54]](#footnote-55) Nevertheless, the principle of teacher autonomy within a framework of LEA control, set by the 1902 Act, survived these changes. The Butler Act reaffirmed the government’s refusal to prescribe the content of school syllabi – even (or perhaps especially) in the politically sensitive area of history. For the next 40 years, ‘official policy’, so far as it existed, was ‘represented by pamphlets issued by the Ministry of Education’.[[55]](#footnote-56) This made the substantial uniformity of history teaching all the more remarkable. Though teaching varied dramatically between grammar and secondary modern schools, some consensus on history curricula prevailed across the bipartite divide: courses in both types of school continued to emphasise national chronology. This applied equally to the teaching of British imperial history – a subject now confronted by the shifting geopolitical realities of the post-war world, including the first major wave of formal decolonisation.

The 1944 Education Act created a structural framework for English education which would endure for more than four decades. Education was now conceived as a universal entitlement for British children, free at the point of delivery.[[56]](#footnote-57) The Board of Education was abolished and replaced with the better funded Ministry of Education – responsible for the maintenance of the new state schools, broadly split into primary (for ages five to eleven) and secondary (for ages eleven upwards) levels. Full-time education was made compulsory up to age 15, with the option of staying on to 18 for students seeking to go on to further study. At secondary level, schools were divided into three categories: academically selective grammar schools, secondary modern schools offering a practical education, and secondary technical schools with an emphasis on science and technology. Admission was decided on the basis of an examination taken at age 11 (the ‘eleven plus’). In practice, secondary technical schools were inconsistently implemented, and the tripartite system became essentially bipartite. More than 70 per cent of students were educated in secondary moderns, compared to 20 per cent in grammars.[[57]](#footnote-58) Grammar schools were socially as well as academically selective, drawing their students primarily from economically privileged backgrounds.

The bipartite system often had the effect of deciding a student’s future at age 11. For some pupils, placement in a secondary modern school amounted to the termination of opportunities to pursue an academically focused curriculum, to continue in education beyond the school leaving age (the age at which full-time education is no longer compulsory), or even to receive formal qualifications.[[58]](#footnote-59) As such, the ‘eleven plus’ came to be viewed as a pass/fail examination. Those who ‘failed’ recorded a sense of shame or inferiority which often followed them into adulthood. The bipartite system was subject to increasing criticism both for its educational failings, and for its role in reflecting and reinforcing class distinctions. The result was a programme of ‘comprehensivisation’, which accelerated following formal government backing in 1965. ‘Comprehensive’ schools were characterised by a non-selective, ‘mixed ability’ intake: the aspiration was to provide equal educational opportunities to all, irrespective of background or ability (whether real or perceived). The Department of Education and Science (DES) ‘requested’ and financially incentivised comprehensivisation.[[59]](#footnote-60) However, the autonomy of LEAs was maintained, and a comprehensive policy was not enforced. As a result, the switch to a comprehensive system was widespread but not universal; some LEAs retained grammar schools as an alternative to comprehensive education. Between 1964 and 1982, the proportion of pupils at comprehensive schools increased from 7 per cent to 90 per cent.[[60]](#footnote-61)

For most of its history, English mass education can be characterised as highly decentralised. Teachers in England enjoyed a degree of professional autonomy and creative freedom unusual within the wider European context.[[61]](#footnote-62) The introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988, under Margaret Thatcher’s third government, marked a break with the fundamental assumptions of this tradition. For the first time in the twentieth century, central government broke substantively from a non-interventionist policy in matters of curricular content. Criticism of the aims, content, and quality of history teaching formed a crucial justification for increased legislative regulation. The National Curriculum prescribed History as a compulsory subject during the first three years of secondary education.[[62]](#footnote-63) It also laid down the minimum content which teachers were expected to cover. These developments speak to distinctive contemporary concerns around national unity and identity. It is for this reason that I take the roll-out of the National Curriculum as the endpoint of my study.

**The Parameters of this Study**

The temporal scope of my thesis encompasses a period of late twentieth century British history stretching from roughly 1965 to 1995. I argue that the teaching of imperial history was contested and reformulated from the mid-1960s onwards; thus, I take 1965 as a symbolic starting point. Nevertheless, I begin with a short, introductory chapter which introduces readers to the teaching of imperial history in English schools in the immediate post-war years (1945-1965). This is intended to provide essential context for the profound changes which took hold in the mid-1960s.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 all have some degree of temporal overlap. Chapters 2 and 3 cover an identical timeframe (1965-1985). I chose to divide them thematically in order to examine two distinct but contemporaneous developments (world history and the rise of anti-racist resistance in education) in an appropriate level of individual detail. Chapter 4 begins its analysis in 1979 – the first year of Margaret Thatcher’s premiership. Conservative backlash against the radical educational experiments of the previous two decades certainly preceded Thatcher’s electoral victory. However, it was given power and encouragement by the new government. This backlash culminated in the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988.

My narrative embraces the process by which the National Curriculum was introduced into schools. It concludes in and around 1995, when the reforms instituted by the Dearing Review reshaped the prescribed curriculum (in order to make it more ‘teachable’). The choice to proceed to 1995 (rather than concluding in 1988) reflects my rejection of a purely political or policy-focused research framework in favour of a broader emphasis on the experience of teaching and being taught in mid- to late- twentieth century England. My decision to conclude with the introduction of the National Curriculum is also motivated by a desire to historicise our present-day reality – in this case the standardisation of curricula and the emergence of state education as a hostile environment for dissent.

There are several reasons behind my choice of timeframe. First, and most obvious, is the lack of existing research on education and empire in the post-war period. As we will see, previous works on related themes tend to conclude in the First World War or its immediate aftermath. This is unsatisfactory on multiple levels. The teaching of imperial history at the empire’s territorial zenith inevitably looked very different to teaching during and after formal decolonisation. Conclusions from studies with an earlier focus cannot be generalised to apply to the post-war period. The loss of empire exerted considerable influence on national self-understanding. As Susanne Grindel notes, the connection between history and identity means that history classrooms are a key site in which the ‘politics of memory’ have been navigated, both during and after the period of formal decolonisation.[[63]](#footnote-64) By examining these themes in the post-war period, I am able to uncover the history of ideas of memory, identity, and nationhood in the era of imperial decline. Such ideas continue to structure the socio-cultural dynamics and political debates of the present – and hence to shape our future.

The following study focuses primarily on the history of the British empire as taught in formal, subject-specific ‘history’ lessons in state-funded secondary schools in England. History, including imperial history, of course enters school curricula in other subjects. However, it is my contention that history has a strong and distinctive disciplinary identity as a taught subject. This identity lends a specific framework to the study of history *qua* ‘History’. The origins and nature of history’s disciplinary identity will be expanded upon further below. I make a partial exception for ‘Integrated Humanities’ courses which treated history as a distinct subject, albeit embedded within a broader, holistic approach to education in the humanities. This is chiefly relevant from the close of the 1960s to the start of the 1980s.

My emphasis is primarily, though not exclusively, on formal history teaching in the secondary school classroom. Again, I feel that history has a distinctive disciplinary identity which structures teaching and which is worthy of analysis in its own right. Education outside the context of the formal teaching of history at secondary level will be analysed in terms of its influence on the historical sensibilities of teachers and students and their expression in school classrooms. Thus, my thesis will describe the impact of ‘hidden curricula’ (the values, customs, and behavioural norms which form the unacknowledged background to school life) and ‘informal curricula’ (school-based learning which falls outside formal, taught lessons).[[64]](#footnote-65) It will also describe the effects of forms of teaching and learning which take place outside of compulsory schooling altogether. This includes popular cultural education, education in the family, peer education, and supplementary or community-based schooling. Such learning is sometimes referred to as ‘informal’, though the term has the tendency to downplay its capacity to be both highly coherent and highly organised.[[65]](#footnote-66)

I have chosen to focus on secondary education as historical studies have enjoyed a more stable, clearly defined place on the school curriculum here than at primary level.[[66]](#footnote-67) I recognise, however, that primary and secondary education cannot be divorced entirely. The education received at primary school naturally influences pupils’ experiences of the transition to secondary education and shapes the demands placed on secondary school teachers. Likewise, the need to equip pupils to transition to secondary school moulds primary school teaching. The mutually constitutive nature of primary and secondary education in England means that the conclusions of this thesis likely have relevance beyond the secondary field. Future research with an explicit focus on primary schooling could demonstrate similarities and differences. It could also illuminate the impact of the sometimes deprecated, uncertain status of historical education at primary level on the teaching of the British empire, and the use of history to construct national identity.

The picture is complicated by the occasionally inconsistent nature of the English school system from age 11 upwards. Although the school leaving age increased from 15 to 16 in 1973, at no point in the twentieth century was post-16 education compulsory. Under the bipartite system, post-16 study was usually restricted to pupils at grammar schools. Grammars, unlike most secondary moderns, typically included a ‘sixth form’ focused on university preparation.[[67]](#footnote-68) Comprehensivisation led to wider opportunities for post-16 education, both in sixth forms integrated within comprehensive schools, and in independent ‘sixth form colleges’. This study both treats sixth form education as a component of secondary education in England and recognises the inequalities attendant upon access.

I take a similar approach to the somewhat anomalous institution of ‘middle’ and ‘combined’ schools. Middle schools were codified under the Education Act of 1964, which gave formal recognition to existing institutions which crossed the standard primary/secondary division.[[68]](#footnote-69) Middle schools were defined as those educating both students below the age of ten years and six months, and those aged twelve and up. ‘Combined’ schools were a subset of middle schools, which taught students from five to twelve.[[69]](#footnote-70) Such institutions remained concentrated in a select group of LEAs, but did experience a brief flowering in the two decades after 1964.[[70]](#footnote-71) This study will occasionally draw on the experiences of middle school students of ordinary secondary age, and of their teachers. There are likely to have been some experiences specific to middle schools, but their statistically negligible nature and uneven distribution means that any particularity does not register in this study.

My research encompasses state schools in all their varied forms. To give a non-exhaustive list, this category includes grammars; secondary moderns; comprehensives; and faith schools (including ‘voluntary aided’ schools, in which a charitable trust supplies part of the running costs). I have chosen to focus on state schools as they form the educational background of the vast majority of English children. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the proportion of English pupils at private schools (fee-paying institutions which are independent of government support) never rose above nine per cent.[[71]](#footnote-72) This is not simply a numbers game (although state school experiences are unquestionably more ‘representative’ of a broad cross-section of the population). Private schools have diverse institutional identities, but many offer a self-consciously ‘elite’ education: the expectation that they are preparing a governing class for leadership shapes the curricula of such schools, whether formal, informal, or hidden.[[72]](#footnote-73) This is particularly true of public schools which, as we will see, played a unique role in educating for imperial leadership. The specificity of the education offered by public schools is worthy of focused study in its own right. Such research could be usefully placed in dialogue with this thesis.

My research is restricted to the teaching of imperial history in England. It does not take a British or ‘four nations’ perspective. This is partly because the education systems of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have developed relatively independently.[[73]](#footnote-74) There are important distinctions in governance, structure, context, and taught content. Furthermore, each of the ‘four nations’ has a profoundly individual relationship to the British empire, structured by the specificities of their historical experience and national identity. In the limited space available in this thesis, I would struggle to do justice to the nuance of these dynamics. I have no desire to homogenise, oversimplify, or to sacrifice depth for breadth.

Britishness is, in more ways than one, an imperial identity. The constituent parts of the United Kingdom were invited to identify with an expansive Britishness, in which imperial pride – and an (uneven) share in the material value extracted from empire – formed unifying bonds.[[74]](#footnote-75) The decline of empire has been posited as a ‘formidable challenge’ to the durability of this ‘unitary Britishness’.[[75]](#footnote-76) Nevertheless, the idea of Britishness was internally hierarchical, and was often forged at the expense of the distinct national identities of the UK’s constituent parts. England may not have been the sole perpetrator – or beneficiary – of empire, but it is clear that Englishness was affirmed and elevated by the imperial experience. Wendy Webster’s study of the relationship between English national identity and empire clarifies early on that her decision to focus on Englishness (in the place of Britishness) was an intentional one. Webster draws on the work of Kenneth Lunn to argue that the common slippage between ideas of Britishness and Englishness is rarely accidental: instead, it reflects an Anglocentric assumption that English identity is the dominant component of Britishness. England thus claims the right ‘to speak for Britain’.[[76]](#footnote-77) Webster notes that popular cultural representations of empire as an English endeavour reflected and reiterated this Anglocentric vision of national identity.[[77]](#footnote-78) Her thesis is taken a step further by Krishan Kumar, who claims that the English identification with ideas of an imperial Britishness rendered meaningless the development of a ‘specifically English national identity’.[[78]](#footnote-79) In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that the decline of empire led to the sometime assertion of a ‘little English’ identity, in opposition to the expansive Britishness of empire.

Ireland was both Britain’s first colony, and an active participant in further imperial expansion.[[79]](#footnote-80) The colonial nature of Northern Ireland’s position within the UK was an especially fraught problem during the time period covered by this thesis. From the late 1960s onwards, various actors in the ‘Troubles’ employed a discourse of colonialism to explain the origins of the conflict and to frame their own participation.[[80]](#footnote-81) Scottish and Welsh experiences, by contrast, have sometimes been explained through a framework of ‘internal colonialism’.[[81]](#footnote-82) ‘Internal colonialism’ describes the construction of the United Kingdom as a process of expansion and domination by an aggressive English state. At its most extreme, this narrative has redefined the British empire as an essentially English endeavour, allowing Scottish and Welsh nationalisms to posit their countries as victims and erasing their complicity.[[82]](#footnote-83)

England’s symbolic position as the heart of the metropole and its status as the largest, the most populous, and the most powerful of the ‘four nations’ made it a logical starting point for research on the place of imperial histories in school classrooms. Additionally, the secondary literature on the English relationship with empire is well-developed, respective to that covering Scotland and Wales (unsurprisingly, there is also a broad range of literature addressing the Irish experience).[[83]](#footnote-84) Within the limited scope of this thesis, I have been unable to situate my research in dialogue with the Scottish, Irish, and Welsh contexts, or to develop a comparative account of the teaching of the British empire. Future research encompassing these contexts could usefully highlight parallels and contrasts across the ‘four nations’.

**Historiography**

It is perhaps a truism to claim that historiography and history cannot be separated: the ways in which we narrate history are influenced by a historical sensibility shaped by the times in which we live, and by our experiences of a present which will one day become the past. This is especially true of the historiographical tradition which addresses the metropolitan impacts of empire and imperialism. Historians who write on this subject are faced by the need to historicise their own discipline. Furthermore, their work is both a product of, and contributor to, the same cultural phenomenon which they set out to study.

Imperial Histories in English Universities

Robert Phillips has argued that the 1970s marked a turning point when school history became less dependent upon academia for its ‘organizing influence’.[[84]](#footnote-85) He notes that the emergence of theories of child development compelled teachers to think seriously about their selection of historical content and its suitability for different age groups. My own research suggests that, as early as the mid-1960s, academics themselves recognised the ability of schoolteachers to push the discipline forward in novel and exciting ways. World history may well have started as an academic sub-discipline, but it was transformed by schools. Likewise, the multicultural and antiracist movements drove changes in historical practice unique to secondary education. They also generated substantial, independent historical research – which would in turn influence scholarship produced within a formal academic setting. Academics played an important part in the debates over the introduction of the National Curriculum. Yet they did so in dialogue with teachers, and in recognition of the unique power of the historical narrative embraced by schools – a power bestowed upon school history by its compulsory, hence (potentially) universal, and universalising nature. Thus, this thesis claims a significant role for English secondary education in shaping the historical discipline in the latter half of the twentieth century. I concur with Laura Carter’s view that **‘**popular history does not “trickle down” into any culture or society from academics’, but ‘plays by its own rules’.[[85]](#footnote-86)

Nevertheless, history developed its distinct disciplinary identity in the universities of the nineteenth century, in a co-constitutive relationship with the ideology of imperialism. As such, context on this period forms an essential background to understanding later debates on the role of empire within school history teaching. The imperial context of history’s disciplinary origins in England has been described by Reba N. Soffer.[[86]](#footnote-87) Honours degree courses were established first at Oxford (1872) and at Cambridge one year later. The goal of such courses was not to produce professional historians. As Soffer suggests, history instead took over the traditional role of Classics as a form of training in moral leadership for the statesmen of tomorrow.[[87]](#footnote-88) As the study of the past of a living civilisation, history was seen to provide a more instructive repository of examples for its students. History’s political purpose was reflected in its content. Despite their differences, both the Oxford and the Cambridge courses emphasised English constitutional history. The historical narrative stressed continuity and teleology: the English constitution was presented as a ‘great inheritance’ transmitted from generation to generation, which enshrined a progressively more perfect vision of ‘reason, consent and liberty’.[[88]](#footnote-89) The role of the historian was to preserve and advance this legacy by inculcating a faithful, ‘evolutionary optimism’ in their young charges. The national past was to act as a guarantor of the national present, and the national future.

To prepare students for governance was to prepare them for colonial rule. At least initially, history as a form of imperial training did not entail dedicated papers in ‘imperial history’, nor a divergence from the English constitutional model. Soffer describes the integration of imperial history within a wider story of English development; a conclusion which is confirmed by Robert Moore’s study of the disciplinary origins of history at the University of Sheffield.[[89]](#footnote-90) As Moore argues, imperialism was conceived of as a process of national ‘expansion’: a term which is suggestive of the way in which empire was easily incorporated into, and absorbed by, the national past and its teleological, developmental logic. In the imperial imaginary, civilisation – represented by British modernity – was envisioned as the culmination of a fixed historical timeline. Taken to its logical conclusion, this framework identified historicity itself as a racially and nationally exclusive property. Those who fell outside of the universalizable mode of British historical development were seen as non-historical – or more precisely *pre*-historical. Thus, nineteenth century imperial conquests in Africa were justified by the mythos of the ‘dark continent’, which denied that African people racialised as Black possessed independent powers of history-making.[[90]](#footnote-91) This temporal logic both defended and naturalised imperialism: White, European intervention was the necessary, animating force by which all societies could fulfil a normative historical destiny. Imperial ‘expansion’ was entirely organic and unplanned, achieved ‘in a fit of absence of mind’.[[91]](#footnote-92)

In *Time’s Monster,* Priya Satia provides a compelling explanation of the function of this teleological, evolutionist approach to historical change as a form of conscience management.[[92]](#footnote-93) Satia contends that notions of historical progression wore different clothes in different contexts. Social Darwinists viewed the march of time as a process of natural selection, in which only the worthy would endure and prosper. Moments of mass death (such as the Great Famine of 1876-78, which killed anywhere from 5.6 to 8.2 million in the Indian sub-continent) could therefore be considered as the tragic but unavoidable judgement of history on those who had failed to become sufficiently modern.[[93]](#footnote-94) Liberal imperialists, on the other hand, might recognise such instances of famine as anomalous past mistakes, for which the present and future imperialist enterprise – itself in a constant state of self-betterment – could atone. In either case, the notion of ‘history as judge’ could be used to dispel anxieties surrounding empire’s moral implications by orienting its gaze towards an exculpatory future.[[94]](#footnote-95) Thus, history’s relationship to empire went far beyond mere complicity. History and empire were mutually constitutive: history provided the rationale for empire and empire animated the study of history. The development of a cohesive historical discipline sat right at the heart of the imperial project. This thesis will track the enduring influence of history as imperial justification within mid- to late- twentieth century English education.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, imperial history gradually began to emerge as an independent sub-discipline, separate from courses in English constitutional history. Richard Drayton and Sarah Stockwell concur that the University of London was pioneering in this regard.[[95]](#footnote-96) Drayton describes the emergent school of Imperial Studies – and its corollary in imperial history – as a form of study moulded by the ‘protagonists’ vision of a world ruled by and for people like themselves’. The global scope of historical study was accompanied by a parochial framework which stressed the importance of race as a historical determinant. In 1945, 35 years after the demand had first been made for a separate paper in ‘English colonial history’, Cambridge finally introduced ‘The Expansion of Europe’.[[96]](#footnote-97)

The emergence of imperial history as a distinct sub-discipline led to an – often binary – separation of ‘domestic’ and ‘imperial’ history in the historiography.[[97]](#footnote-98) Nevertheless, the new sub-discipline of imperial history re-enshrined the evolutionary logic of previous papers with an English constitutional emphasis. As David Fieldhouse has argued, imperial history was written as the unfolding of a natural, progressive pattern by which ‘small European societies’ were transformed into ‘world powers’, spreading the fruits of their own historical advancement.[[98]](#footnote-99) In the process of colonisation, colonised societies lost their ‘historical autonomy’ and were subsumed within the imperial grand narrative. Fieldhouse was responding to a perceived crisis facing the sub-discipline of imperial history. In the era of formal decolonisation, ‘area studies’ and nationally focused accounts of the histories of formerly colonised nations (both of which decentred the coloniser’s perspective) challenged the assumptions of a unitary ‘imperial history’. Additionally, the association between imperial and imperial*ist* history attracted doubt and criticism. In this context, Fieldhouse asked whether the field ‘could be put together again’. Although he concluded in the affirmative, the future of the sub-discipline was far from assured.

Fieldhouse’s call to reformulate imperial history for the late twentieth century would soon be answered. From the 1990s onwards, the ‘new imperial history’ challenged the detachment of ‘domestic’ and ‘imperial’ histories and considered metropole and colony ‘within the same historiographical field’.[[99]](#footnote-100) The new imperial history tended to situate metropolitan experience within broader global networks, decentring the ‘centre’. It also placed a heavy emphasis on culture. In these circumstances, it is unsurprising that attention turned to the influence of colonisation and decolonisation on metropolitan culture. Thus, the minimal and maximal impact theses were born. These combative polarities have sometimes stripped discussion of the necessary nuance. As we have already seen, the saturation of English culture by imperial ideology does not necessarily map on to a conscious celebration of empire.

Empire and Imperialism in English Schools

The historiography on empire and imperialism in English schools has a distinctly uneven temporal focus. The majority of existing literature encompasses the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It tends to embrace the First World War and its immediate aftermath but to cut off before the Second.[[100]](#footnote-101) There are several plausible reasons for this emphasis. First, the period in question corresponds to the zenith of the British empire’s territorial reach and to outward manifestations of imperial and patriotic enthusiasm. Thus, the period claims an important place in debates over how far imperialism truly penetrated public consciousness (the minimal and maximal impact theses). Second, the First World War is often identified as a fundamental turning point in the history of empire and imperialism, which makes it a logical endpoint for studies examining the preceding decades.

There is broad agreement that the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked the apex of explicitly imperialist teaching in grant-funded English schools, though opinions diverge on how far this reflected and/or influenced popular culture.[[101]](#footnote-102) In the context of escalating rivalry between the European powers, history (whether taught as an independent subject, or in the context of ‘readers’ designed to promote literacy) appears to have taken on a more defined function as a form of mass education in patriotic pride and national values. The militaristic mood entailed a new emphasis on foreign conquest. Porter writes that the empire featured in ‘just about every new history book published after 1880’.[[102]](#footnote-103) Significantly, he argues that imperial expansion was no longer justified with reference to the ‘spread of liberty’: the growth of empire could be viewed as a good in and of itself. Criticism, where present, was reserved for those individuals who failed to live up to the ‘highest imperial ideals’ – a personal, rather than a systematic problem. Indeed, as Satia has argued, the imperial system was represented as capable of redeeming such flaws.[[103]](#footnote-104) Teachers were subject to the influence of public opinion, and to the concerted lobbying of organisations ideologically committed to the imperial project; the (in)famous wall-maps displaying British imperial possessions in pink and red were in fact widely distributed as a product of Imperial League sponsorship.[[104]](#footnote-105) If ever there was a moment at which the mass of English schoolchildren was invited to feel pride that the ‘the red bits are British’, it was in the decades leading up to the First World War.[[105]](#footnote-106)

British public schools – the top echelon of independent, fee-paying institutions – reflected the mood of the time, albeit with a different emphasis. The public schools, much like the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, embraced a self-consciously elite ethos: their students were prepared for governance and leadership, which in this period necessarily entailed a preparation for colonial rule. Given the centrality of public schooling to the imperial project, they have understandably been the focus of significant scholarly interest. The work of J.A. Mangan is emblematic.[[106]](#footnote-107) Mangan focuses less on the taught content of the formal curriculum, and more on the socialising influence of the informal curriculum which upheld ideals of hierarchy, martial masculinity, and service. Porter argues that the informal curriculum may in fact have been the primary means of imperial education in these institutions.[[107]](#footnote-108) History, when it entered into the picture as a formal subject, was often confined to the ‘Classical world’ of Greece and Rome, which were believed to offer important exemplars.

Michael Roper has described the First World War as a moment which fundamentally unsettled the imperial certainties of the Edwardian public school environment: the heroic masculinity cultivated by such institutions was ‘buried in the mud of Flanders’.[[108]](#footnote-109) The trauma of war was felt on both a personal and a public level. The 1931 satirical history *1066 And All That* offers a window into a newly uncertain national self-perception. W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman concluded their account of Britain’s past with the First World War, which they interpreted as final proof that the United States of America had superseded Britain as ‘top nation’.[[109]](#footnote-110) Sellar and Yeatman labelled 1918 as the end not just of their history, but of *history itself.* In so doing, they described the decline and fall of the confident teleology which had structured historical writing in earlier decades – in which the past was a progressive march to social and political perfection, and in which empire became the ‘ultimate fulfilment of the country’s historic mission’.[[110]](#footnote-111) It is for this reason that Raphael Samuel interprets *1066 And All That* as an ‘underrated anti-imperialistic tract [which] punctured some of the more bombastic claims of drum-and-trumpet history’.[[111]](#footnote-112)

Unfortunately, the sense that history ended with the First World War (or its aftermath) seems to have been embraced by many scholars of empire and education. This is symptomatic of a broader silence in the debate over the imperial content of British (or English) culture and society. As Anna Claeys notes, academic discussion has ‘focused predominantly on the empire’s heyday before 1914 and the interwar period’, only occasionally ‘stretching beyond 1945’ (her own work is the exception that proves the rule).[[112]](#footnote-113) The dominance of literature covering the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries may be partially responsible for some of the assumptions now typically made about the history of imperial history teaching. If the narrative cuts off prior to (or even during) the First World War, readers could be forgiven for walking away with a general impression that imperial celebration has traditionally structured English history teaching. If the narrative concludes shortly after 1918, with an emphasis on a national crisis of confidence and on ‘education for peace’, the reader may well decide that histories of empire became progressively less dominant – and less celebratory – from that point on.[[113]](#footnote-114)

The teaching of imperial history from mid-century onwards has never received the attention of a dedicated monograph or thesis – a gap which my research aims to fill. Such histories appear in fragments within longer works, short articles with a limited temporal scope, or in reflections on memory and national identity in the social sciences. For example, Cannadine, Keating, and Sheldon’s *The Right Kind of History: Teaching the Past in Twentieth-Century England* provides essential context for broad shifts in teaching practice and historical understanding. It is possible to glean details of the teaching (and erasure) of imperial history from its pages. However, empire barely appears as an explicit subject of analysis, especially after 1945.[[114]](#footnote-115) It makes only an occasional appearance in Raphael Samuel’s reflections on history, history teaching, and national identity, which were penned in the midst of the debate on the introduction of the national curriculum.[[115]](#footnote-116) This is an intriguing absence, since he shared my conviction that the disappearance of empire from history curricula demonstrated a troubling refusal to confront its legacy. Sally Tomlinson’s *Education and Race from Empire to Brexit* identifies racialised experiences of education as a legacy of empire, but the teaching of empire, where it appears, is very much a secondary theme.[[116]](#footnote-117) On the other hand, sociologists and cultural theorists have engaged extensively with the place of the imperial past in contemporary culture and society (as in the work of Gilroy, described above), but have rarely linked their analysis back to the role of formal, school-based historical education.[[117]](#footnote-118)

In fact, the most prolonged engagement with the teaching of imperial history in mid- to late-twentieth century may perhaps be found in a 17-page article by Claeys.[[118]](#footnote-119) Although I agree with her assessment that imperial ideas survived in schools into the 1970s (and beyond), my work differs profoundly in its assessment of the causes of this survival. We concur that schools were encouraged to teach the Commonwealth as the ‘continuation of empire by other means’.[[119]](#footnote-120) However, while Claeys views this initiative as broadly successful, my own research suggests that the Commonwealth’s imperial connections contributed to its marginalisation in history syllabi.

Sources in the History of Education and Empire

Textbooks have long been the dominant means through which to examine the teaching of history – including the history of empire. This is perhaps unsurprising; they offer a tangible, widely documented inheritance from the classrooms of the past. Norman Graves has claimed that textbooks are a straightforward expression of the ‘current ethos’ of their authors’ society – a position which seems to deny the agency and subjectivity of educators.[[120]](#footnote-121) Nevertheless, it is certainly true that they represent not just the views of a single author, but a wider body of opinion.[[121]](#footnote-122) Most textbooks are produced to meet existing demand. The editorial process (sometimes accompanied by reviews or trials in schools) also canvasses a variety of different opinions. Textbooks must therefore demonstrate something about the needs and priorities of those responsible for determining the curriculum.

There are practical problems, however, with an overreliance on textbooks as a source-base. MacDermid and Foster used a large sample size of textbooks in their comparative history of the teaching of the British empire between 1920 and 1939, and 2015 and 2023. They noted that most previous studies on related themes concentrated on ‘small numbers of books covering limited time periods’.[[122]](#footnote-123) This was attributed to a lack of availability of sales data, and to the time-intensive nature of research involving close reading of textually dense materials. As Tina van der Vlies points out, textbooks also suffer from a ‘time-lag’: the gap between the emergence of ‘new findings or ideas’ and the ‘production of new or revised textbooks’ (one could add to this formulation the gap between the production of new textbooks and schools’ financial ability to purchase them).[[123]](#footnote-124) Historians of education who use textbooks as their primary source base must therefore work across a broad temporal scope if they wish to track changes – and may risk overemphasising continuity.

Even leaving aside such practical barriers, reliance upon textbooks as a source-base raises questions around bias and erasure. Textbooks traditionally emphasise exam preparation. Given that exams were primarily the preserve of grammar school students in the immediate post-war years, textbooks from this period often provide insights into the education of a socially exclusive minority.[[124]](#footnote-125) In secondary moderns, teaching embraced a much broader range of materials. Equally troublingly, textbooks are a poor guide to classroom dynamics. It would be a mistake to view curricula as static collections of content; not for nothing do historians of education refer to the ‘black box of schooling’.[[125]](#footnote-126) Even in traditional ‘talk and chalk’ settings, textbooks have rarely been co-extensive with taught content; history teachers have fiercely guarded their position as subject specialists with the ability to offer expert guidance. Furthermore, the materials the teacher *intends* to present rarely map precisely onto the lesson delivered. This is because the process of knowledge production cannot be one-sided. Even in the most authoritarian classroom, in which power is conceived as unipolar, the teacher cannot control the subjective reactions of pupils, nor their vocalisation. Depending upon the attitude of the teacher, and the manner in which the response is expressed, such contributions might be interpreted as positive ‘participation’ or negative ‘disruption’. The line between the two is thin and context dependent. Thus, the history set down in textbooks offers greater insight into educational ideals than educational reality. An exclusive emphasis on textbooks tends to erase two of the most important influences on school history teaching: teachers and students.

In the last two decades, some historians of education have moved to embrace a wider source-base, in a bid to access the experiential dimension of teaching and being taught history. Cannadine, Keating, and Sheldon based their history of history teaching on an extraordinarily diverse range of materials.[[126]](#footnote-127) They set printed sources (including textbooks, legislation, and official reports) in dialogue with students’ workbooks, and oral history interviews with both pupils and teachers. Tellingly, the project had to create its own archive in order to document and describe the lived experience of historical education. This archive remains publicly accessible and has exerted an influence far beyond the original project, fostering ‘bottom up’ accounts of history teaching. Claeys’ history of the teaching of empire and Commonwealth draws upon student work and interviews from this archive, though her sample size is relatively small.[[127]](#footnote-128)

Oral histories carry a specific set of internal dynamics and ‘risks’ (or values, depending on your perspective) associated with the vagaries of memory. The passage of time causes some events to be forgotten and others to take on new significance. Hindsight encourages reflection and reinterpretation. Furthermore, the emphases of questions, and the narrative choices made by interviewees, often reflect current priorities. The resulting archives can tell us as much about the present as they do about the past, and historians must be wary of treating oral sources as a simple demonstration of ‘the way things were’. The use of oral history also has a limitation specific to the histories of childhood - and by extension histories of education. The categories of ‘adult’ and ‘child’ are socially constructed, often in opposition to one another.[[128]](#footnote-129) Their relationship is also hierarchical: adults are given stewardship over children, and the attainment of ‘adulthood’ is posed as the product of positive progression to a state of enhanced maturity and reflexivity. An individual’s positioning as an adult or child will necessarily affect their perspective on these categories. Oral history recordings made ‘after the fact’ reflect the views of adults looking back at their childhood. In this sense, they remain ‘adult-produced materials’, inflected with the assumptions of the differential status of adulthood.[[129]](#footnote-130)

For this reason, modern histories of childhood place a premium on the voices of contemporary children.[[130]](#footnote-131) The history of education, despite its natural entanglement with the history of childhood, has been much slower to embrace child-authored or child-narrated sources.[[131]](#footnote-132) Conventional wisdom says that the systematic marginalisation of children’s voices is reflected in the archive. It may well be that it is harder to access these voices than ‘adult-produced materials’. However, the study of child-produced sources is essential to develop a more accurate and complete account of educational history. Crucially, such sources allow us to reconceptualise young people as participants in, rather than recipients of, education. In recent years, the work of Laura Tisdall and the resources produced by the ‘Secondary Education and Social Change in the United Kingdom since 1945’ (SESC) research project have both helped to model the ‘child’s eye view’ of educational history.[[132]](#footnote-133) These authors have all approached the role played by racial identity in the construction and deconstruction of history in mass education; empire features in their accounts but is again confined to the periphery. By contrast, Rob Waters has used child-authored sources to explore youth conceptions of history and identity, with substantial reference to empire; his emphasis, however, is on Black Saturday Schools (voluntary organisations which primarily operated outside of, if in dialogue with, state-funded mass education).[[133]](#footnote-134)

**Sources and Methodology**

In building an appropriate source-base, I have drawn on lessons derived from the critical analysis of the use of primary sources in the existing historiography, as outlined above. First, a brief note on sources I *do not* use. A decision was taken early on to rely on existing sources, rather than to generate my own archive. There is a need to expand the work initiated by the team behind *The Right Kind of History* and to document the history of pupils’ schoolwork. Schoolwork is of immense importance in reconstructing children's perspectives on education and on history, yet it is rarely represented in the archives. To initiate a collection would go far beyond the boundaries of a Doctoral thesis. More importantly, I declined to conduct my own oral history interviews. It seemed likely that the contemporary resonances of the topic of my research, and the current hyper-politicisation of histories of empire and school history, would generate narratives of the past heavily inflected with present concerns. Of course, the influence of contemporary debate on recollections of the teaching of British imperial history is a subject worthy of study in its own right. It was not, however, the story I wanted to tell here. As detailed below, I have occasionally drawn upon existing oral history projects, conducted with different emphases in different times.

This thesis does make use of textbooks and other classroom resources (for example teachers’ packs). In the upper secondary classes, where ‘teaching to the exam’ was a common occurrence, such materials tend to correlate more heavily with actual taught content. However, I acknowledge that textbooks generally provide a stronger guide to the theory than the practice of history teaching. Due to the ‘time-lag’ between new ideas, new textbooks, and new purchases for classroom use, textbooks may act as an inhibiting factor in educational change.[[134]](#footnote-135) If one accepts, however, that changes in taught content and teaching style occur somewhat independently of textbook production, textbooks must be treated as a poor means through which to examine such change. As a result, my thesis diverges from historiographical tradition by relegating textbooks to a secondary, supporting role. Where used, they are placed in dialogue with other sources which offer a more direct insight into the lived experience of teaching and learning empire.

The period in question was one in which the ethos and purpose of history teaching was repeatedly called into question. The need to defend and to justify the role of history on school curricula generated intense professional debate at a national level. Dedicated newsletters and journals were created in order to facilitate these conversations. Publications such as the HA’s *Teaching History*, or the Inner London Education Authority’s *Clio,* may have entertained the voices of academics and politicians, but theywere produced by and for teachers. As a result, they provide an invaluable insight into teachers’ opinions on curricular matters, contemporary examples of ‘best practice’, and candid advice on planning and delivering lessons on key topics. Alongside more formal guidelines distributed within the teaching profession, this thesis relies on such resources to illuminate educational practice (as opposed to educational theory). Occasionally, teachers’ writings also reveal crucial details on the reception of teaching, or on the co-construction of a historical narrative with pupils. Here, elements of student experience are demonstrated – albeit through the sometimes-distorting lens of the teacher, guided in their interpretation by adult subjectivity, pedagogical theory, and professional power and responsibility relative to the student.

In Chapter 3, this thesis breaks new ground in embracing the ‘child’s eye view’ of learning about empire. Taking my lead from Waters’ study of Saturday Schools, I examine the development of children’s and young people's historical sensibility in spaces outside of full time, state education.[[135]](#footnote-136) This branch of my research encompasses the influences of family, community, and popular culture on school students’ understanding of imperial history. I then track the ways in which these understandings manifested in mass education. To this end, I have utilised examples of children’s writing from Saturday Schools in the archives of the George Padmore Institute and the London Metropolitan Archives. I also use anthologies of children’s writing and published collections of transcribed interviews.

Of course, the simple identification of any of these sources as ‘child-authored’ or ‘child-narrated’ is potentially problematic. There are various forms of adult mediation in these sources. Texts produced within the context of Saturday Schools would have been shaped by the demands of teachers. Similarly, writing submitted for inclusion in an anthology would be crafted to impress the (usually adult) selection panel. Adult writers tended to exercise editorial control over interview transcripts published for public consumption. Prefaces, commentary, and textual layout all act as framing devices which mediate a reader’s interpretation of the text. As a politically and culturally marginalised group, the voices of children are especially vulnerable to direction and/or distortion. However, these problems are by no means *specific* to children. Tisdall objects to the false binary which asserts that adults are autonomous actors removed from exogenous influence, while children are ‘passive recipients of culture with no minds of their own’.[[136]](#footnote-137) As we would with adult-produced sources, it is helpful to read child-produced sources with an awareness of the forces which influence their self-narration, *but not to discount their words as a result.* In some cases, I have supplemented the voices of contemporary children with reflections from adults who grew up in the period in question, both in the form of biographies and existing oral history interviews. They are a supporting pillar of my analysis, rather than the centre of focus, owing to the questions (raised above) surrounding the vagaries of memory and the narrative impact of subsequent events.

Finally, my thesis makes extensive use of collections held at the National Archives in London, pertaining to the formulation of the National Curriculum. This includes minutes from the History Working Group (HWG), its successors in the subsequent processes of review and revision, and Prime Ministerial Private Office files. As already noted, this is a history of experience rather than theory, and of people rather than policy. However, these forces inevitably interact. In the late 1980s, they seemed to collide. The National Curriculum was formulated in response to intense public anxieties regarding national identity and the country’s relationship to its past. As such, official documentation from this period includes reflection on, and engagement with, the voices of teachers, parents, press, and the general public. The extensive consultation process which preceded the introduction of the National Curriculum encompassed large groups of teachers, whose voices are represented in the archives – though often in a condensed, summarised, or generalised form. Furthermore, the National Curriculum symbolised the entry of government into the intricate details of curricular construction. Thus, an understanding of the policy process and its results provides essential background to any understanding of teaching and learning in the following years. Additional insights into this process are offered by the oral history archive generated by the researchers behind *The Right Kind of History*. I have made use of interviews with several former Ministers for Education and members of the HWG. The details contained within these interviews help to clarify the rationale behind decisions which appear in finished form in official documentation, and to elucidate the internal logic of an often-labyrinthine drafting process.

**Chapter Structure**

My thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 offers a brief, introductory overview of the teaching of imperial history in English schools in the immediate post-war years. I argue that imperial history enjoyed a stable, celebratory, but marginal place on the school curriculum during this period. Nevertheless, there was growing awareness that the changing geopolitical context of the post-war world – including a wave of imperial territorial retreat and the rise of the new ‘superpowers’ – necessitated changes in the framing and conceptualisation of empire and imperial history. Central government advocated for the history of empire to be rewritten as a history of Commonwealth – a narrative which by turns sought to obscure and redeem colonial violence. As the public mood turned against imperial remembrance, the persistent connection between imperial and Commonwealth histories threatened their place in secondary school classrooms, prompting a decline in uptake.

Chapter 2 examines the development of two connected historical approaches, world history and the ‘new history’, which emerged in response to demands for curricular relevance in an era marked by decolonisation and globalisation. Both contributed to the further marginalisation of the teaching of ‘imperial and Commonwealth history’ as a defined subject area. World history defined itself in opposition to the old school of imperial and Commonwealth history; in its desire to shed the negative resonances of imperial history, world history largely ignored the history of empire. As a product of this silence, many of the old logics of imperial(ist) historical understanding were able to survive uncriticised and unchecked – a pattern which was reproduced in the taught content of SCHP world history courses. However, the SCHP’s ‘new historical’ ethos of student-led interpretation may well have opened space for criticism and dissent.

Chapter 3 describes how students from colonised backgrounds helped to unsettle dominant historical assumptions – sometimes at significant personal cost. I argue that family history, and the legacy of historical knowledge bequeathed by conversations with elders, could inspire young people to intervene to modify or correct the content delivered by teachers. In so doing, students educated their peers. Depending on the setting, these interventions could be variously interpreted as helpful or disruptive. Some students of colour were fundamentally alienated by their experiences in history classrooms. Others mobilised to demand changes to history curricula, specifically the inclusion of formal tuition on anti-imperial resistance. In the pre-National Curriculum era, when content was set by the individual school, this was a realisable goal.

Chapter 4 encompasses the construction of ideological hegemony by the New Right. It interprets the formulation of the National Curriculum as part of this hegemonic project. I argue that the Education Reform Act and the resulting National Curriculum in History represented a racialised, disciplinary logic. By the mid-1990s, teachers were more likely than ever before to teach the history of non-European countries on their own terms, rather than as extensions of the metropolitan core. Additionally, the space for dissent and challenge within the education system had been dramatically narrowed. The creative autonomy which had fed the radical educational experiments of the previous two decades was deliberately and effectively removed.

To summarise, the 1960s marked a turning point at which developments in and beyond the classroom pushed imperial history further towards the margins of school curricula. This thesis will tease out where and how it was taught, while accounting for gaps, silences, and contestations. Overall, my work makes three key interventions. It demonstrates the impact of a national culture of ‘postcolonial melancholia’ on teaching and learning in mid-to late-twentieth century Britain.[[137]](#footnote-138) Secondly, it helps to reconceptualise education as a multidirectional process: not only the teacher, but also students, their families, and their communities are demonstrated to be significant actors. This is emphasis is most prominent in my third Chapter. Third, it serves as a powerful reminder that what history we choose to teach matters to students, especially those who are downwardly racialised.

# 1. A Decline, not a Fall: Empire and Commonwealth History in English Classrooms, 1945-1965

*I suspect that the most potent reason for this continued neglect of the Empire is the unwillingness of teachers of history to leave their well-worn groove […] it is easier to repeat the familiar description of the English manor or to expound the results of the Crusades than to embark on the reading necessary for an intelligent treatment of a theme so varied and intricate as the development of the Empire*.[[138]](#footnote-139) **F.B. Malim, 1944.**

**Chapter Summary**

The following Chapter offers an introductory overview of the teaching of British imperial history in English secondary school classrooms in the immediate post-war years. It argues that the colonial retreat which followed the Second World War was culturally and educationally less significant than that of the 1960s. As such, Chapter 1 serves to provide the background necessary to understand the more radical shifts of the late twentieth century. Despite the decentralised nature of the English education system, a standard curricular model persisted and proved resistant to change. History teaching tended to prioritise a political outline of the national past. Imperial history was taught (though not necessarily received) through a celebratory, Anglocentric lens. International initiatives which sought to reform syllabi to promote cross-cultural understanding were undercut by the weight of imperialist historiographical assumptions. Efforts to ‘update’ the teaching of imperial history by superimposing a vision of the modern Commonwealth backwards onto empire proved unsuccessful. By the middle of the 1960s, changes in the popular cultural reception of the imperial past placed the teaching of empire and Commonwealth history on the defensive.

John Darwin has accurately described the ‘corrosive’ effect of the Second World War on the British empire. In East and Southeast Asia, the conflict led to British ‘humiliation’ by the Japanese empire and to the ‘virtual break-up of the colonial order’.[[139]](#footnote-140) In South Asia, a deliberate policy of mass starvation, escalating anger, and the progressive weakening of the instruments of colonial rule – all combined with the sacrifices of colonial troops in the fight against the Axis powers – led to a reluctant promise of post-war independence for British India. British politicians, and the nation at large, were not unshaken by the loss of the ‘jewel in the imperial crown’.[[140]](#footnote-141) However, a general faith seems to have been maintained in the institution and ideology of empire. Decolonisation could, in fact, be used to bolster the imperial historical narrative, in academia and beyond. Sarah Stockwell refers to a ‘whiggish interpretation’ which presented the dissolution of empire as the ‘culmination rather than the wreck of British ambitions’.[[141]](#footnote-142) This was reflected in metropolitan coverage of Indian independence in 1947, which was organised around a theme of ‘pride in a job well done’.[[142]](#footnote-143) Independence was read as the final fulfilment of the British mission of service and the violence of Partition dismissed as the natural outgrowth of an Eastern temperament, rather than a specific legacy of colonial rule.

The media both fostered and reflected the persistence of imperial culture at a popular level. John M. MacKenzie supplies convincing evidence to this effect.[[143]](#footnote-144) As MacKenzie notes, the discourse of empire remained a popular and reliable vote-winner for Conservative candidates throughout the 1950s. In youth culture, too, the imperial tradition remained prominent; the colonial adventure stories of G.A. Henty, Sir Henry Rider Haggard, and R.M. Ballantyne ‘remained in print and still constituted some of the prime elements of the prize and present market for children’.[[144]](#footnote-145) The act of awarding romances of empire to meritorious school-students in British schools is significant for the purposes of this analysis. It implies that, in secondary education, as in the universities, existing narratives and forms of imperial history survived well into the 1950s – and perhaps beyond. The legacy of the Second World War appears to have had a more significant influence on curricula in the 1940s and 1950s than decolonisation.

Aldrich and Dean characterise English history teaching in the immediate post-war years as conciliatory in its thematic and ideological orientation: in the wake of violence and destruction, there emerged a desire to teach for international understanding, supported by transnational bodies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).[[145]](#footnote-146) Education for international understanding entailed critical perspectives on national(ist) bias. An effort was to be made to view British history, including British imperial history, ‘through others’ eyes’. *Some Suggestions on the Teaching of History*, a UNESCO-sponsored publication by the French educator Marie-Thérèse Maurette, argued that England’s parochial equation of history teaching with teaching the ‘history of the nation’ ironically excised a crucial part of the national story.[[146]](#footnote-147) The refusal to look beyond current borders produced ignorance of the ways in which English history was ‘inextricably bound up with that of most of the countries of Europe – and later, as a result of the building of the Empire, with that of the whole world’.

Maurette asked her readers to consider how many ‘Occidentals’ might know more than the ‘bare outline of the history of India, which with 300 million inhabitants and a land surface as great as Europe, holds a key position in Asia?’[[147]](#footnote-148) UNESCO attributed this knowledge gap to the historical self-aggrandisement of European powers. ‘Up to the present’, the organisation noted, ‘European culture and scholarship have dominated the writing of history, and the contributions of other regions and cultures have not received their proper place in the textbooks’.[[148]](#footnote-149) The writing of history from a ‘world point of view’ was therefore conceptualised as a necessary decentring of the European experience – albeit not from a subaltern position. UNESCO was very clear that the gap necessitated ‘more research by Western scholars in these other cultures’, rather than a process of listening to history as narrated by colonised subjects and those in the Global South.[[149]](#footnote-150) Nevertheless, old imperial frameworks continued to structure much of UNESCO’s historical and educational work.

In 1951, UNESCO formalised its commitment to sponsoring the documentation of history on a world-scale – the ambitious and unprecedented History of Mankind project. The project employed historians from across the globe to write a history of humanity from its dawn to the present, with an emphasis on inter-cultural commonalities, connections, and exchange. It was hoped that this work would both embody and fulfil the UN’s aspirations of international solidarity and world peace.[[150]](#footnote-151) Poul Duedahl distinguishes between the ‘long-term political project’ theorised by the United Nations (UN) and adjacent bodies – which he characterises as representing a major development in the writing of global history – and the eventual product of their endeavours, which he characterises as a ‘work of dubious reputation’.[[151]](#footnote-152) The project is represented as a ground-breaking confrontation with the orthodoxies of Eurocentric and ethnocentric history. As Duedahl freely acknowledges, however, the broad geographical scope of the project’s focus did not influence its epistemological underpinnings: an Enlightenment-derived theory of historical progress was retained.

This conclusion is supported by Glenda Sluga and Paul Betts’ respective analyses of UNESCO’s History of Mankind project. Both scholars stress the significance of evolutionist approaches to history to the History of Mankind and to Julian Huxley – UNESCO’s first Director-General and one of the project’s core intellectual progenitors.[[152]](#footnote-153) Central to Huxley’s worldview was a quasi-biological belief in ‘man’s role’ as custodian of ‘the evolutionary process’ of history.[[153]](#footnote-154) A teleological, even Whiggish understanding of the relation between past, present, and future was implicit within his reasoning. The guiding principle of history was the development of scientific and technological knowledge, its logical endpoint the growth of peaceable international cooperation – embodied by organisations like the UN.[[154]](#footnote-155) Evolutionism thus folded all to easily into universalism, with its promotion of a singular notion of past and present as an all-embracing, inescapable model for future ‘development’.[[155]](#footnote-156)

Betts draws attention to the silences attendant upon this narrative of historical progression. He observes that the adoption of ‘exchange, commonality and progress’ as organising themes led to a subordination of ‘the unpleasant aspects of history’ – including ‘colonialism, slavery or even war’.[[156]](#footnote-157) Clearly, the absence of such histories – understood as moments of fundamental crisis and rupture by the enslaved or colonised – undermines the History of Mankind’s claim to represent a genuinely world-wide view of the past.[[157]](#footnote-158) However, there was also a deeper colonial logic at play in the story of linear progress; these ideas possessed an obvious heritage in the liberal imperialist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The History of Mankind’s reiteration of imperial theories of history was no mere coincidence; Huxley had himself been involved in the liberal imperialist movement of the early twentieth century. As Sluga describes, Huxley enjoyed an extended career in the British Colonial Office before switching his focus to the UN. He brought with him an interest in classification of humanity into various ‘sub-species’ and phases of development, and a belief in the paternalistic duty of ‘civilised’ nations to act as trustees or tutors of ‘backward’ peoples.[[158]](#footnote-159) The History of Mankind’s emphasis on linear technological, scientific, and political progress towards a fixed end point may be read as the direct legacy of these connections.

The History of Mankind was always intended as an educational project. Huxley’s close friend and UNESCO colleague Joseph Needham hoped that the resulting history might, in Duedahl’s words, act as ‘an antidote to the kind of history taught in many schools’, with its narrowly national focus on military and political events.[[159]](#footnote-160) The French historian Lucien Febvre, who founded the *Journal of World History* in order to gather material relevant to the History of Mankind project, similarly envisioned its role as the foundation-stone of a ‘new kind of teaching — the teaching of a non-political world history, a teaching which will be, by definition, consecrated to peace’.[[160]](#footnote-161) As Betts describes, abortive interventions in the field of higher education encouraged the UN to turn its attention to the education of school students by the beginning of the 1950s.[[161]](#footnote-162) Initial plans for knowledge pertaining to the History of Mankind to ‘trickle down’ into schools were frustrated. However, Duedahl notes that a selection of articles from the *Journal of World History* were published as ‘readings in the History of Mankind’, which enjoyed a much wider distribution – including to educational institutions – than their journal of origin.[[162]](#footnote-163)

It can be suggested that the historical and educational work of the UK’s Parliamentary Group for World Government (PGWG) was a belated flowering of this tradition, which likewise carried the marks of an imperial heritage. The PGWG was an all-party group of Members of Parliament (MPs) founded shortly after the Second World War to promote federal government on a global scale – an ambition which was to be realised through the growth and transformation of the UN.[[163]](#footnote-164) In 1967, the group’s Education Advisory Committee surveyed contemporary efforts to teach British history from a ‘world perspective’.[[164]](#footnote-165) The final chapter of the resulting text described the PGWG’s ‘One World Examination Syllabus Competition’, in which a prize was offered to the teacher (or trainee teacher) who submitted the ‘best detailed syllabus […] balancing national loyalty’ with loyalty to the ‘human race as a whole’.[[165]](#footnote-166) The authors selected an Ordinary Level GCE syllabus submitted by Sulwyn Lewis, a Welsh grammar school teacher, as the winner.

The notes provided on the content of Lewis’ syllabus offered a patronising acknowledgement that ‘technically backward’ countries did not exist in a state of abject dependency on the intellectual and financial resources of the Global North: ‘the amount of work many Eastern countries have achieved by their own resources only, is impressive’.[[166]](#footnote-167) Global disparities in wealth were attributed to the ‘historical accident’ of the naturally uneven distribution of such resources, in a telling erasure of the extractive practices at the heart of the imperial project. The deliberate silencing of imperial exploitation allowed the authors to portray Britain’s relationship to the rest of the world as one of paternalistic guidance; through goodwill and the benevolent patronage of the ‘advanced’ world, ‘backward’ societies could be led to a higher level of human existence (industrialism; urbanisation; capitalist consumerism; liberal democracy). Histories of colonisation and imperialism were reinscribed as a long march toward international cooperation in the interest of universal progress. Once again, the ends were believed to justify the means.

The modes of imperial justification employed by UNESCO and its British allies problematise Aldrich and Dean’s view that teaching in the immediate post-war years was marked by self-reflective humility.[[167]](#footnote-168) The ideological structures of imperial history remained intact. Furthermore, as the country moved into the 1950s, empire remained a stable – though by no means central – feature of the national story, as narrated in history classrooms. In 1954, the HA published a revised edition of *Notes on the Teaching of British Imperial History (For Age Groups 15-18)*, authored by the Eton-based teacher and textbook writer C.R.N. Routh. Routh offered a strident justification of the moral worth of an education in imperial history. The ‘vision, courage, humanity and faith’ of British empire builders – men such as Raffles, Durham, Livingstone, and Rhodes – would ‘build and improve [the] character’ of the nation’s youth.[[168]](#footnote-169) Likewise, Routh believed that the study of empire was crucial to national self-understanding. The history of Britain could not be understood or appreciated, he asserted, if its ‘greatest achievement’ was neglected.

As this implies, Routh’s account bestowed benevolent intentions both on individual imperialists, and the imperial system as a whole. *Notes on the Teaching of British Imperial History* advised teachers to prioritise the study of the ambitions and philosophy of empire over the internal history of different colonies.[[169]](#footnote-170) Its author named three principal aims of the British imperial project: the governance of new settlements overseas (the White Dominions) ‘until they came of age’ and achieved independence; the adaptation of ‘Asiatic peoples’ to ‘modern conditions’; and the education of ‘primitive and backward peoples in the ways of law, order and justice’. Such statements betrayed a racialised judgement of the differential capacities of peoples and nations to govern themselves. There was also a threat of violence implicit in Routh’s approach to modernisation: conformity to a rigid developmental model based on British norms was not to be achieved by consent of the governed. The colonisers could be trusted to act in the best interest of the colonised.

Routh viewed his historical analysis as an objective truth, based upon ‘hard facts and figures’.[[170]](#footnote-171) However, his judgement relied upon the selection of evidence to obscure the experiences of colonised peoples. For example, British settler colonialism was presented as a form of cultivation of vast, ‘empty’ space. The very existence of indigenous peoples was thus erased – a cultural and historical extension of the genocidal process of settlement and expansion. The careful excision of histories revealing the violent logics inherent to the imperial project allowed Routh to reduce brutality to singular instances of (regrettable) ‘human error’.

Routh’s tract was as much defensive as it was assertive. The author believed that the teaching of imperial history had failed to achieve the prominence warranted by its ‘interest and importance’.[[171]](#footnote-172) He cited several factors which lay behind the subject’s neglect. University history departments were accused of teaching empire as a series of constitutional milestones – ‘an approach well calculated to destroy all enthusiasm for the history of the British peoples overseas’. This stagnant and dull field of academic study was ill-equipped to serve the growing appetite of school history teachers for information and resources. Routh claimed that history teachers had answered ‘attacks’ on British imperialism (‘provoked chiefly by affairs in India and directed principally from the United States’) by throwing imperial history into an overcrowded timetable, without due recourse to the fundamental educational ‘machinery’ of textbooks, teaching aids, and suitable exam syllabi. Teachers were thus left in a predicament: under-resourced, unsupported, and inexperienced, but committed to exposing the dangerous ‘historical ignorance’ of anti-imperial thought. Routh reassured his fellow educators that the tides were turning: Cambridge University Press had answered the demand for texts suitable for use at a secondary level with a dedicated new series.[[172]](#footnote-173) Additionally, the Royal Empire Society could be relied upon to bring ‘the man on the spot’ into the classroom, offering educational visits from current and former Governors and District Commissioners.

Routh noted one further obstacle to the teaching of imperial history: that of student opposition. His text devoted considerable space to advice on addressing – and combatting – an ‘immediate, persistent and totally uninformed suspicion on the part of the Sixth Form student as soon as the word Imperialism is uttered’.[[173]](#footnote-174) Routh acknowledged that pupils’ scepticism may form an important counterweight to ‘national bigotry and self-righteousness’. Yet such scepticism was characterised as itself a form of prejudice which stood in the way of ‘true historical judgement’. Simple statistical analysis would be sufficient to refute allegations of imperial injustice and correct students’ historical bias. Here, Routh erected a juxtaposition between his own adulation of empire (objective; fact-based) and his students’ critical approach (subjective; emotional). Imperial benevolence was presented as a fundamental truth, removed from the political and/or ideological currents which shaped anti-imperial thought – a familiar machination in the defence of empire.

Routh’s concern with justifying imperialism to school students suggests that they were willing to vocalise hostility to received narratives. His own teaching experience was firmly based in an elite institution in the private sector. However, the HA’s decision to publish (and reprint) his reflections indicated that they were believed to have a more general relevance. Routh attributed student opposition to the broader scepticism of the age.[[174]](#footnote-175) The self-assurance with which pupils challenged the traditional distribution of authority within the classroom might be seen as an early premonition of the ‘decline in deference’ which Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite has posited as a major feature of late twentieth century Britain.[[175]](#footnote-176) The post-war collapse of a deferential culture has itself been linked to the end of empire, when satire and parody emerged as popular entertainment forms in a bid to render ‘dramatic changes in the national self-image’ less threatening.[[176]](#footnote-177) Routh’s experience usefully points towards two central features of educational history: power in classrooms is rarely unipolar, and the narrative given by teachers is not always that received by students.

Contemporary syllabi affirm Routh’s judgement that imperial history was widely taught but rarely emphasised. In 1952 the Ministry of Education released *Teaching History*, a pamphlet which combined reflection on contemporary historical education with guidelines for best practice. The pamphlet attracted a considerable readership and would be reprinted multiple times through to the mid-1960s. *Teaching History* provides an invaluable guide to school curricula in post-war Britain, especially in grammar schools, where rigid university entrance requirements imposed considerable uniformity.[[177]](#footnote-178) Some three-quarters of grammar schools were believed to teach to the following structure, with minor variation:

Age 11-12: Pre-History, Ancient Civilizations, or Mediaeval History.

Age 12-13: The Tudors and Stuarts.

Age 13-14: The Eighteenth Century in England, with some American and Empire History and sometimes the Eighteenth Century in Europe.

Age 14-15 and Age 15-16**:** Nineteenth-century English and European History (occasionally American) to be taken for certificate examination.[[178]](#footnote-179)

At all stages of study, national history (variously conceived as English or British) formed the core of the curriculum. Generally speaking, students would move from earlier periods to later periods as they got older. Teachers justified this structure on both an ideological and a pedagogical basis. Progression through the ages was believed to illuminate the grand narrative arc of national history (‘a great story nobly told’).[[179]](#footnote-180) The alien nature of temporally distant historical events was expected to hold ‘imaginative appeal’ for younger students. For their older peers, recent history would serve as an introduction to the world into which they would enter upon leaving school.

Secondary moderns offered more varied and experimental curricula. They were guided by the pursuit of relevance for students who would likely leave school, enter employment, and assume many of the responsibilities of adult life before the age of 16.[[180]](#footnote-181) While grammar schools tended to end their chronological narrative with the start of the First World War, secondary moderns often extended further, seeking to bring history ‘up to date’. Social and economic history often took priority over the old-style ‘political outline’.[[181]](#footnote-182) Thematic study, which included histories of clothing, trade, and food, provided links with pupils’ vocational work.[[182]](#footnote-183) Teaching was also more likely to apply broad categories of analysis: history was inscribed as a form of movement between ‘distinct phases’ of development (feudalism and industrialism, for example). Nevertheless, the traditional idea of ‘history as an evolution, as bestowing a heritage’ had survived and was implicit in the chronological, sequential organisation of nationally based content. English history remained at the core, situated at times in a European and – particularly in the later stages of a pupil’s education – a world setting.[[183]](#footnote-184) The world dimension typically included both US and Commonwealth history.

Grammar schools and secondary moderns concurred on the start-date for ‘relevant’, ‘modern’ history: in both cases, courses for pupils aged 14 and above tended to start around 1776.[[184]](#footnote-185) Previously, school syllabi had placed the beginning of modernity much earlier, in 1485. As *Teaching History* noted, the transference of the beginning of ‘modern history’ from 1485 to 1776 represented a ‘shift in emphasis as well as in period’.[[185]](#footnote-186) 1485, the year in which Henry VII inaugurated the Tudor dynasty, had been symbolic of the flowering of a distinctive national consciousness (expressed in his successor’s break with Roman Catholicism). It was also redolent of the cultural achievements of the Renaissance. By contrast, a start-date of 1776, the year of the American Revolution, spoke to a less introspective vision of British history. This was the history of the nation on the world stage, expressed through the dual processes of colonisation and decolonisation. The later starting point also had the effect of placing a greater emphasis on the history of the nineteenth century, including industrialisation and the High Imperialist era.

The study of empire was heavily concentrated in upper forms. Imperial history from 1776 onwards appeared at age 13-14. In the examination forms (ages 14-15 and ages 15-16), empire appeared in two principal guises: in the highly popular nineteenth century English papers, and in dedicated imperial and Commonwealth history papers.[[186]](#footnote-187) According to *Teaching History*, nineteenth century English papers ranged widely, but covered the following topics with a clear imperial dimension:

Gladstone and Disraeli at home and abroad; ‘The Irish Problem’ (usually ending in 1886, with the failure of Gladstone's First Home Rule Bill); the evolution of Dominion Status in Canada and Australia; The Boer Wars; South America; ‘The Eastern Question’ and the Congress of Berlin (which transferred control of Cyprus from the Ottoman to the British empire); ‘The Scramble for Africa’.[[187]](#footnote-188)

The use of descriptors such as ‘The Irish Problem’ or ‘The Scramble for Africa’ implies a denial of the subjectivity and agency of the colonised. This was an imperial history seen principally (or even exclusively) through British eyes, as an extension of domestic politics. Nor was imperial history anything more than marginal to the totality of the examination syllabus: as one government publication lamented, ‘nineteenth century experiments in constitutional advance’ were referred to only ‘incidentally’.[[188]](#footnote-189)

Dedicated imperial and Commonwealth examination courses were both less common and less popular.[[189]](#footnote-190) In 1967, the Oxfordshire teacher G.M.D. Howat reported on the uptake of empire and Commonwealth history in English schools, writing under the auspices of the HA. He described a tradition of marginality, in which the empire was treated as ‘incidental’ to a British and European curricular core.[[190]](#footnote-191) Indeed, Howat concluded that ‘at no time since history has been a serious subject for study in schools has Empire and Commonwealth History played a large part’. This was exemplified by the position of empire and Commonwealth history in the examination forms. Howat alleged that sixth form teachers had received ‘little encouragement’ from the A Level papers set by Oxford and Cambridge colleges. At A Level, empire and Commonwealth history was thus represented only in a limited number of ‘special papers’. These themes were better served by a range of papers at O Level, albeit with low candidate numbers.

The University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) was one of the boards that did offer a paper on the ‘History of the British Empire and Commonwealth’ at O Level. The syllabus covered the years 1558 to 1939, divided into two periods (1558-1783, and 1740-1939).[[191]](#footnote-192) It demanded some knowledge of the ‘history and development of the most important countries of the Empire and Commonwealth’. Nevertheless, examination papers typically only demanded knowledge of the British experience, told as a political and constitutional outline, with the lives of American settlers, growing anti-British sentiment, and the Declaration of Independence featuring as a brief diversion. In the July 1957 paper, only one question (‘Describe the relations between Great Britain and members of the British Empire and Commonwealth during the years 1914-39’) offered an opportunity to consider empire from an alternative perspective.[[192]](#footnote-193) Even here, students could legitimately centre the British experience and achieve good marks. Roughly the same pattern seems to have prevailed at A Level, where papers in imperial and Commonwealth history (sometimes presented as an option within a wider ‘World Affairs’ unit) remained a minority choice with a British, constitutional perspective.[[193]](#footnote-194) Imperial and Commonwealth history would only be pushed further towards the margins as Britain advanced into the 1960s.

**From Empire to Commonwealth – and Back Again**

The contradictions and ambiguities built into the Commonwealth’s very nature were borne out in successive governments’ fraught attempts to compose a (sympathetic, celebratory) Commonwealth history for use in schools. In 1961, the Ministry of Education published *Schools and the Commonwealth* –a plea for the increased status of Commonwealth studies in schools, authored by a group of Her Majesty’s Inspectors (a category of official responsible for reporting on education in the state sector to relevant ministers). The authors posited Commonwealth history as a crucial part of education for international understanding and world citizenship in the post-war era. The Commonwealth was believed to embody the values of ‘equality and friendship’ and to act as a historically unprecedented bulwark against the ‘fear of conflict between people of different race and colours’.[[194]](#footnote-195) Furthermore, knowledge of the Commonwealth – ‘its origins, development and present significance’ – was viewed as fundamental to an understanding of Britain’s place in contemporary world affairs.

Like Routh’s earlier advocacy for empire, this appeal for the teaching of Commonwealth history was born out of anxiety rather than confidence. By drawing attention to the administrative expertise derived from Britain’s colonial past, the authors were staking a claim for the country’s continued relevance in the post-colonial world:

We should not be afraid to recognise that, in the realm of ideas and ideals and of practical experience in the conduct of human affairs, the United Kingdom can still make to the world an unrivalled contribution, which is independent of physical strength or material power.[[195]](#footnote-196)

*Schools and the Commonwealth* was laden with a sense of danger. Its authors sought to defend Britain not only against the consequences of decolonisation, but against the anti-imperial critiques which precipitated decolonisation. These two threats were tied together in the figure of the USA. The fraught co-existence of American imperial ascendancy with a performative anti-colonialism (often referring back to the rejection of British power during the American Revolutionary War) formed a striking subtext to the pamphlet.[[196]](#footnote-197) It was only by ‘understanding more fully and […] teaching more positively’ the nature of Commonwealth history that, the authors argued, American accusations of colonial brutality might be countered. If Britain’s future was to be guaranteed on the international stage, its past must be defended at all costs. This desperate defence of the privileges conferred by Britain’s imperial role sits at odds with the pamphlet’s assertion that the Commonwealth was characterised by ‘absolute equality’ between member nations.

The threat was not merely external. *Schools and the Commonwealth* also sought to defend the Commonwealth from rampant British scepticism. Against accusations that ‘pressure of internal frictions’ or the ‘prospect of new and more rewarding political alignments’ might lead to the Commonwealth’s early disintegration, the authors set out to prove that the organisation had the strength to endure.[[197]](#footnote-198) They acknowledged that teaching on the subject was routinely marginalised due to teachers’ lack of knowledge and experience and, more significantly, prevailing qualms about the entanglement of empire and Commonwealth. Yet the group’s answer to such doubts only deepened this entanglement.

In *Schools and the Commonwealth*, the Commonwealth’s very existence functioned as an exculpatory device – redeeming colonial violence and alleviating bad conscience. A momentary recognition that ‘the Commonwealth story has not been one of unbroken idealism and progress’ was quickly qualified with the claim that ‘Britain’s part in the development of the Commonwealth is one in which even the most censorious can take pride’.[[198]](#footnote-199) Of note here is a curious terminological slippage, which appears to project the Commonwealth back in time, superimposing its image upon that of the empire. This apparent error of phrasing is in fact indicative of a broader theme within the pamphlet – that the benevolent internationalism of the Commonwealth was both prefigured and moulded by that of the British empire. The authors identified colonial governance with an unproblematised ideal of trusteeship; imperial rule, the reader was informed, was exercised ‘for the benefit of dependent peoples until such time as they were able to take over responsibility for themselves’.[[199]](#footnote-200) Proof of imperial justice was ultimately located in the supposedly seamless transition from empire to Commonwealth, which the authors claimed was accomplished with ‘little bitterness and recrimination’.[[200]](#footnote-201) No other country, they argued, could rival the experience of the United Kingdom, which had led

one-time dependent peoples to maturity and independence, without any sense of inferiority or of unwelcome obligation, so that the revolutionary leaders of yesterday become the Prime Ministers of today, and independence serves, paradoxically, only to cement relationships which were recently regarded as an intolerable burden.[[201]](#footnote-202)

The Commonwealth was thus plotted as the culmination and climax of the liberal imperialist timeline. It served as vindication for colonial policy which, for all its occasional errors, was an overwhelmingly benevolent, progressive force.

The attitudes evinced by *Schools and the Commonwealth* were of a piece with the broader political project of the Commonwealth in the decades immediately following the Second World War. Philip Murphy, a historian and former Director of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, has argued that a deliberate ‘forgetfulness’ of certain legacies of empire was a major building-block in the construction of the Commonwealth.[[202]](#footnote-203) The silencing of empire was enacted by the same transposition of the Commonwealth identified above: histories of British imperialism were to be acknowledged only insofar as they could be used to support a narrative in which Commonwealth set the pattern for empire, rather than the other way round. In Murphy’s words:

In the independence period, the Commonwealth’s boost to the UK’s international image was obvious: being on friendly terms with former colonies sent a powerful signal that, in spite of all that had happened, Britain was essentially one of the good guys. There is [and was] no escaping this reality of the decolonizing context in which the Commonwealth was established.[[203]](#footnote-204)

There is an obvious link between the Commonwealth policy of ‘forgetfulness’ and ‘Operation Legacy’, which saw the British government and colonial administrations collaborate in the destruction and/or concealment of the records of British rule, in an effort to insulate the UK from the dual risks of guilt and accountability.[[204]](#footnote-205)

*The Commonwealth in Education* – a 1966 reworking of the 1961 text – displayed greater self-awareness. At this time, the Commonwealth’s future seemed far from certain. The sincerity of its commitment to the promotion of racial and national equality was under attack in the wake of disputes over South African membership, and of new immigration laws depriving Commonwealth citizens of the full rights of British citizenship.[[205]](#footnote-206) British trade with the Commonwealth declined year on year. In this context, the organisation was often portrayed as an imperial relic obstructing Britain’s true destiny as a *European* power.[[206]](#footnote-207) The pamphlet acknowledged the doubts which might accrue to the centring of the Commonwealth in teaching under such circumstances. Teachers, the text made clear, had expressed concerns that the teaching of Commonwealth history might amount to a ‘special pleading for Britain’s greatness’ or an ‘up-to-date substitute for the white man’s burden’ and the glamour of an imperial past.[[207]](#footnote-208) To many, the Commonwealth appeared as a mask behind which Britain’s ‘ruthless self-interest’ could operate.

The pamphlet’s own habit of ‘pleading for Britain’s greatness’ did little to allay such doubts. Once again, empire and Commonwealth were neatly enfolded, presented as part of the same historical continuum. Commonwealth history, the authors argued, had the ‘*intrinsic* danger [emphasis added]’ of showing Britain ‘in a consistently good light’.[[208]](#footnote-209) This risk could be avoided by balancing descriptions of the British imperial past with due attention to the views of the colonised – allowing former British subjects to be understood as historical agents in their own right rather than as the passive recipients of European generosity. Such was the authors’ belief in the justice of the imperial project, they did not expect the voices of the colonised to draw it into question. Imperial violence was presented as individual, rather than systematic: the product of simple errors of judgement, or of the ‘social climate of the time’.[[209]](#footnote-210) Both explanations served to deny that there was anything *fundamentally* exploitative about the colonial relationship. The exculpation of individual imperialists under the assumption that they were ‘of their time’ is also inaccurate. As Priyamvada Gopal has convincingly argued, such statements silence the voices of contemporary anti-colonialists in archives across the world.[[210]](#footnote-211) They therefore become active participants in a deliberate process of historical forgetting and imperial rehabilitation.

The Commonwealth could not divest itself of imperial connotations. After all, to study the history of the Commonwealth is to study the history of the British empire. Significantly, its advocates were also inconsistent in seeking to divorce the two systems. Although the Commonwealth was sometimes articulated as an entirely new model for international cooperation, of a piece with the UN, it was more often presented as an extension and justification of imperial doctrine. In 1961, *Schools and the Commonwealth* had remarked that ‘imperial’ and ‘colonial’ had both become ‘terms of reproach in the current political idiom’.[[211]](#footnote-212) As the 1960s advanced and the public mood turned against straightforward celebration – or even remembrance – of the imperial past, the enmeshed nature of empire and Commonwealth threatened the presence of both on school curricula. Far from rehabilitating empire, the government writing of Commonwealth history vindicated concerns that the Commonwealth was itself a neo-colonial endeavour.

**Imperial History on the Defensive**

On the eve of the 1960s, the London History Teachers’ Association (LHTA) complained that ‘Empire’ and ‘Imperial’ had become ‘dirty words’, both within and beyond the profession.[[212]](#footnote-213) Thus, the teaching of imperial history had been placed beyond a moral pale. LHTA assumed that the teaching of imperial history was an inherently imperialist endeavour – an argument which may read as bizarre in the context of today’s debates, but which makes sense when the disciplinary origins of imperial history are considered. Imperial history had emerged as a means to justify and naturalise empire. By the 1960s, the imperial grand narrative lay broken, ruptured by formal decolonisation and by anti-colonial movements’ claims to historical autonomy. To survive, imperial history would have to be reconstituted on entirely different terms. In this context, Fieldhouse wondered whether the ‘old imperial history’ was doomed to suffer the same obsoletion as astrology or phrenology.[[213]](#footnote-214) He would ultimately conclude that it could be reassembled into new, ‘intellectually respectable’ patterns. Many, however, refused to believe that imperial history could be divorced from complicity in (or celebration of) the imperial project. To use Fieldhouse’s framework, teachers seem to have been unwilling or unable to ‘put humpty-dumpty together again’.

Guides to the teaching and learning of African history, dating from the 1960s, display an unwillingness to discard the time-honoured grand narrative of a White racial monopoly on historicity. In 1961, the HA published *European Rule in Africa,* authored by A.J. Hanna (Lecturer in Modern History at the University of Southampton). The text’s title set out its expectation of which aspects of African history were worth teaching: the continent’s past was reducible to the history of European intervention. Like Roper, Hanna believed that colonisation had *made Africa historical*; the African people had no independent powers of history-making, nor indeed any sense of the fundamental ‘connection between cause and effect’.[[214]](#footnote-215) This was both a cultural and a racial judgement. Hanna was careful to note that such comments applied only to his imagined racial landscape ‘south of the Sahara’ – north Africa, with its ‘Berber and Arab’ inhabitants was excluded from analysis.

*European Rule in Africa* informed teachers that ‘conditions in Africa would still be roughly what they were a century ago, had it not been for the introduction of European administration, European instruction, and contact with the European economy’.[[215]](#footnote-216) According to this narrative, European actions, however violent, were not blameworthy – but nor were they strictly benevolent. Instead, European imperialism was interpreted as a necessary stage in a predetermined historical process. It was ‘out of the question’, the publication argued, that Africa ‘could continue forever in economic stagnation and political chaos […] while in every other continent the facility of communications and the pace of economic development were rapidly increasing’.

African and European cultures were plotted as two points on a linear timeline in which progress was assumed and assured. The European presence in Africa was a tool of historical destiny, allowing ‘the African […] to travel the entire distance to twentieth-century civilisation from his starting-point in the early Iron Age’.[[216]](#footnote-217) British imperialists could not be held personally, or even collectively, responsible for actions determined by Social Darwinist laws of historical development. As Satia argues in connection to the first appearance of such narratives during the late-Victorian era, this reasoning could act as a highly effective tool for the management of guilt and bad-conscience experienced by Europeans confronting the violent underpinnings of national wealth and prestige.[[217]](#footnote-218) In part, this may account for its enduring popularity.

Hanna’s work was not simply an isolated holdover from yesteryear. *European Rule in Africa* was revised and reprinted in 1965.[[218]](#footnote-219) In 1968, the HA published *The Teaching of African History* – a teachers’ guide co-authored by the HMI members Zoë Marsh and Peter Collister. Marsh and Collister reiterated a biological and geographical determinism. They imagined great feats of bravery and the drama of intense emotional responses, all engendered by a hostile and unforgiving climate.[[219]](#footnote-220) Africa, they claimed, naturally gave rise to ‘heroes of Arthurian stature’: a state of being difficult to appreciate in ‘misty lands where mellow thought matches a moderate climate’. The authors left no room for doubt that the ‘heroes’ to whom they referred were White colonisers. Once again, the ‘coming of the Europeans’ was proclaimed the ‘greatest event in African history’, if not the moment at which Africa first entered into history.

The persistence of such narratives may have vindicated fears that the discipline of imperial history could be divorced from complicity in the imperial project. Given the habitual conflation of empire and Commonwealth, the latter was ensnared in this generalised mistrust. *The Teaching of History in Secondary Schools,* a 1974 training guide produced by the Assistant Masters Association (AMA), implied that the Commonwealth had been the object of a deliberate attempt to divest the topic of its association with jingoistic accounts of imperial expansion. AMA celebrated the disappearance of the stigma which had identified Commonwealth history with ‘an even more biased form of national history’, attributing these changes to ‘new approaches which highlight the emergence of a unique form of partnership of self-governing states’.[[220]](#footnote-221) They acknowledged, however, that this apparent divestment had had little success in increasing the popularity of the subject.

Indeed, by the start of the 1970s, the already low uptake of imperial and Commonwealth history seemed to be in sharp decline – a phenomenon both prompted by and reflected in the cutting of examination papers. A 1971 report noted that imperial and Commonwealth history had all but ‘disappeared’ at A Level, except in the Associated Examining Board (AEB) examinations, while it was retained at O Level only by AEB, Oxford, Cambridge and Northern Universities.[[221]](#footnote-222) Howat had attributed imperial and Commonwealth history’s habitual failure to attract a large candidature to its unfortunate association with the narration of the past as a ‘confused parade of constitutional milestones’.[[222]](#footnote-223) As we will see in Chapter 2, the rise of child-centred learning demanded teaching with demonstrable relevance to the lives and interests of young audiences; dry political sequences, learned by rote, came under fire.[[223]](#footnote-224) However, the contemporary shift in public attitudes to empire seems to offer another powerful reason for the decline in imperial and Commonwealth history as an examination topic.

In the 1970s to the close of the 1980s, imperial and Commonwealth history lived on in two principal forms. We have already seen that many schools chose to offer some form of empire history at ages 13 to 14 (the last year of compulsory history, prior to the choosing of ‘options’ for public exams). Episodes such as the ‘Scramble for Africa’ or the American War of Independence seem to have been widely taught, and to have been approached primarily as an extension of British political and constitutional history.[[224]](#footnote-225) Students in this age range and below were also introduced to Britain’s imperial past through the themes of ‘discovery’ and ‘exploration’. The 1967 publication *Notes on the Teaching of Empire and Commonwealth History*, produced by the HA, stressed the power of such narratives in engaging lower secondary forms. Younger secondary students, teachers were advised, would ‘derive a great deal of pleasure from the adventures of the Elizabethan sailors or the explorations of men like Cook and Livingstone’.[[225]](#footnote-226) In *The Teaching of African History,* published the following year, it was suggested that teachers should supplement the already-popular study of ‘fifteenth century explorers and subsequent maritime discoveries’ with topic-work on the exploration of Africa by land.[[226]](#footnote-227)

The very notion of ‘discovery’ carried within it a denial of indigenous existence which accepted and reinforced the genocidal logic of settler colonialism. The lives of the explorers who made these ‘discoveries’ were often written in the style of adventure stories. Marsh and Collister asserted the value of African history – with its intrinsic ‘colour, excitement, romance, courage, [and] adventure’ – for engaging young audiences.[[227]](#footnote-228) In making the history of empire appealing to younger students, the tropes of discovery, exploration, and adventure had a sanitising effect, sheering empire of much of its violence and functioning as distancing mechanisms. The heroes of the imperial narrative were necessarily confronted by obstacles as a test of bravery, but these could never be portrayed as insuperable, nor presented in such a light as to undermine sympathy for the protagonists. Thus, *European Rule in Africa* lauded the Kenyan settlers’ achievements in overcoming the ‘unwillingness of the African tribesman […] to do any regular work’.[[228]](#footnote-229) In keeping with the taxonomies of race science, this passage represented the Kenyan people as pathologically and immutably lazy. The idea that non-cooperation with the British might have been a mechanism of survival and resistance for much of the rural population was excised from the narrative. The cultivation of student interest was to be founded on a close identification between student and coloniser/hero. The affective dimension of these studies may well have contributed to their enduring popularity. As late as 1987, an Economic and Social Research Council report on the teaching of history in secondary schools found that ‘exploration and discovery’ remained common themes in the second and third years.[[229]](#footnote-230)

By the start of the 1970s, it seems that the teaching of imperial history was suffering a decline in English secondary schools, though it did not fall out of the picture entirely. The timeline of this shift affirms MacKenzie’s conclusion that, in cultural terms, the loss of empire had a greater impact in the 1960s and succeeding years than in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.[[230]](#footnote-231) As we will see, other sub-disciplines and historical themes compounded and profited from its decline. Most notably, world history emerged as a rival to the old school of imperial and Commonwealth history, such as it had existed in English classrooms. If continuity and (to a lesser degree) consensus characterised the teaching of history from 1945 to the end of the 1950s, change and division were the watchwords of the 1960s. As Aldrich and Dean put it, ‘the 1960s ushered in a period of such fundamental social and educational change that a series of new, and potentially conflicting and competing, histories was bound to emerge’.[[231]](#footnote-232) The next two chapters will track changes in the teaching of imperial and Commonwealth history from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s – a period of a quarter of a century which saw substantial challenges to some of the fundamental assumptions of the historical narrative and its presentation in school classrooms.

# 2. The World in the Classroom, 1965-1985

*It is surely far more important for young people to know the facts about Vietnam than it is to know all the details of the Wars of the Roses.[[232]](#footnote-233)***Edward Short, Labour Minister of Education, to the Association of Education Committees (1968).**

**Chapter Summary**

The following chapter examines two coterminous, teacher-led curricular changes: the introduction of the ‘new history’ and of ‘world history’ into English classrooms. Both sought to reimagine the subject in line with the changing needs of modern pupils. In most schools, world history was added to – but did not replace – the British, chronological content of the ‘great tradition’. World history was conceived as an escape from the grandiose claims to national and/or civilisational superiority traditionally enshrined by imperial and Commonwealth history. By contrast, world history tended to ignore empire entirely. Instead, it emphasised the diplomatic relations of the modern ‘Superpowers’, or a flattened, picturesque vision of foreign cultures. By removing empire from its frame of analysis, world history facilitated the perseverance of imperial logics as a ‘pathology of presence’. The ‘new history’ stressed the independent analytical powers of the pupil-as-historian. Its dominant formulation, the Schools Council History Project, paid little attention to histories of empire. Nevertheless, its valorisation of independent historical study opened space for the contestation of received narratives, and for students to create their own linkages between past and present.

By all accounts, the 1960s inaugurated a period of intense professional anxiety for British educators. Individual careers were acutely affected by the administrative upheaval of comprehensivisation.[[233]](#footnote-234) The comprehensive movement was accompanied by mounting conservative attacks on progressive education (soon to crystallise into the *Black Papers on Education*, the first of which was published in 1969).[[234]](#footnote-235) As a result, teachers knew themselves to be operating in an intensely politicised environment. Anxieties were heightened by a long-term fall in teachers’ relative salaries, which had narrowed the wage differential between teachers and skilled manual workers.[[235]](#footnote-236) Many associated this economic redistribution with a redistribution of social authority. Teachers believed that the traditional respect afforded to their profession – and indeed their very designation as ‘professionals’ – was subject to interrogation and renegotiation. By themselves, these events were sufficient to erode professional security and self-esteem.

For history teachers, however, the crisis went deeper. The progressive educational movement, with its focus on ‘child-centred learning’, was generating new research into the educational experiences of pupils. Such enquiries presented a damning indictment of attitudes to history teaching amongst the school-age population.[[236]](#footnote-237) The Schools Council was the body tasked with coordinating public examinations at secondary level between 1964 and 1984. In a 1968 survey of 9,677 secondary students, the Council determined that only 41 percent of boys, and 40 percent of girls in the 13-16 age group found history ‘interesting’.[[237]](#footnote-238) A mere 21 percent of male ‘Young School Leavers’ (defined as those leaving at 15) defined history as ‘useful and interesting’, to 19 percent who found it ‘useless and boring’. The statistics are even more marked for their female contemporaries, amongst whom the equivalent statistics are 19 and 22 percent, respectively.

Mary Price’s impassioned call to arms in a 1968 edition of the HA journal *History* was emblematic of contemporary fears for the subject’s future:

It would be an exaggeration to say that all teachers of history in schools at the present time feel a considerable degree of perplexity, even of pessimism, about their subject but this is certainly true of many. Moreover there are not a few who are actually apprehensive about its future and see a real danger of history disappearing from the time-table as a subject in its own right, surviving only as an ingredient of social studies, or civics, or combined courses of one kind and another.[[238]](#footnote-239)

As Robert Phillips has observed, the HA’s conception in a university environment lent it an elitist image amongst teachers.[[239]](#footnote-240) By the 1960s, however, the sense of a looming disciplinary crisis prompted it to deepen connections with schools. The HA recognised the importance of foregrounding teachers’ professional opinions in the fight to preserve the place of history in the nation’s classrooms. To this end, it founded a new journal – *Teaching History* – which would centre the concerns of educators and provide a forum in which to navigate disciplinary challenges.[[240]](#footnote-241) Though the HA retained a certain reputation of lofty condescension over the coming decades, *Teaching History* would provide a lively, genuinely popular form for professional discussion amongst school staff.

Pupils’ critiques of historical teaching tended to focus on the predominance of traditional, ‘talk and chalk’ methods, and on the issue of relevance. To many pupils, the histories presented at school simply seemed too far removed from present concerns to merit real interest.[[241]](#footnote-242) Meanwhile, new subjects (including ‘Integrated Humanities’ and the social sciences) were annexing secondary schools’ limited funding and timetable spaces on the basis of claims to educate children in the realities of contemporary life.[[242]](#footnote-243) The problem was partly thematic. By the 1960s, the process of formal, political decolonisation was firmly underway.[[243]](#footnote-244) The Suez Crisis had engendered serious national reflection on Britain’s loss of global influence. The bilateral shape of Cold War politics illuminated the ascendancy of the United States of America – and confirmed Britain’s role as a sometime accessory to other great powers. A changing landscape of media, technology, and travel ensured that the nation was aware of the world around it as never before. In this context, it was difficult to justify an insular historical narrative which placed Britain at the centre of the world. The traditional English history curriculum – chronological and national – seemed out of step with an era of unprecedented global interconnection.[[244]](#footnote-245)

**‘New History’ and World History**

Two interlinked trends arose in response to demands for history to demonstrate ‘relevance’ in order to justify a place on the school timetable: the ‘new history’ and world history. The ‘new history’ is typically associated with the arrival of the Schools Council History Project (SCHP) in 1972. The Project’s quest for relevance was ideological as well as practical. Its founding members took a child-centred approach to historical education. As such, they sought to create a course which answered the specific ‘personal and social needs’ of modern pupils.[[245]](#footnote-246) SCHP promoted active participation in the processes of historical work, rather than passive absorption of knowledge. Students were encouraged to develop a distinctive set of theoretical and methodological ‘skills’ which they could use to construct their own explanations of past events. The Project’s guiding philosophy was pithily summarised by David Sylvester, its first Director: ‘pupils should do history, not receive it’.[[246]](#footnote-247) By challenging the great tradition’s assumption of history as a ‘received subject’, SCHP opened the space for new content.[[247]](#footnote-248) The course aimed to cultivate awareness of ‘the significance and limitations of historical evidence, the balance between change and continuity, the problems of causation, and the importance of […] empathy’.[[248]](#footnote-249) The nationally-focused, linear chronology of the great tradition was self-evidently unsuitable for the development of such skills.

In concert with teachers and pilot schools, a Project team based at the University of Leeds created a novel history syllabus for students aged 13 to 16. Pilot exams were first held in 1974 and full public exams followed two years later, under the joint administration of the Southern Universities Joint Board and the Southern Regional Examinations Board.[[249]](#footnote-250) The exam syllabus consisted of four components, each justified by a unique claim to utility (a full list is given in Appendix A). For example, ‘Studies in World History’, also known as ‘Modern World Studies’ (‘MWS’), encouraged students to historicise the ‘burning issues and problems of the contemporary world’.[[250]](#footnote-251) MWS represented the application of SCHP’s unique methodological approach to ‘world history’ – a new historical sub-discipline which emerged in a university context and was quickly taken up by teachers pursuing the coveted ideal of ‘relevant’ historical content.

The 1960s witnessed the arrival of pioneering work by scholars such as William McNeill, Geoffrey Barraclough, E.H. Dance and John Roberts, all of whom adopted a world perspective on the past in a bid to better understand contemporary events. In the early years of world history’s development as a formal academic discipline, definitions of the field and its aims were inconsistent and mutable. Barraclough distinguished the broad geographical perspective of his work from the totalising philosophy of other historians attempting to synthesise human history into a unitary narrative.[[251]](#footnote-252) Despite his best efforts, world history maintained an association with universalist and homogenising grand narrative which, as this chapter will explore, was reflected in school teaching practice.

Burgeoning interest in the use of world history within schools is indicated by the prominence of major world historians within the HA; this included both Dance (sometime Vice-President) and Barraclough (sometime President). In a Presidential Address to the Association’s 1966 Diamond Jubilee Conference, Barraclough praised a recent shift in emphasis within history teaching, driven by the ‘inexorable pressure of the world around us’.[[252]](#footnote-253) Barraclough quoted Dance to the effect that, in an increasingly interconnected world, the inward-looking tradition of English history teaching no longer offered pupils adequate preparation for the responsibilities of modern citizenship. To secure history’s long-term future in school curricula, it was necessary to look both inwards and outwards – to pivot away from insular discussions over causation to a wider perspective on the *outcomes* of major historical events, and to turn a critical gaze on the supposed objectivity of historical writing.

Barraclough was by no means isolated in his beliefs. His contemporary, Martin Ballard, a former history teacher turned Director of the Educational Publisher’s Council, described much of the knowledge transmitted to history students as ‘palpably useless’ in the context of a changing world.[[253]](#footnote-254) As Ballard explained in an essay addressed to his fellow educators:

It yearly becomes more clear that history teaching must break out of the narrow nationalistic strait-jacket in which it has lived for so long. In a century of world-wide communications – and indeed of world-wide warfare – it has become inexcusable that teachers should continue to work from syllabuses which were designed to prepare pupils for life in a narrower environment.[[254]](#footnote-255)

Ballard believed that a world historical perspective was not only vital to enable pupils to understand and act within an inescapably interconnected world, but to secure the very future of that world; the rise of the atom bomb left no room for the promotion of parochialism or national chauvinism in school classrooms. The 1972 edition of the popular *Handbook for History Teachers*, published by the University of London Institute of Education, hoped that world history might promote attitudinal shifts amongst students, from ‘my people right or wrong’ to ‘my people as part of the human family’.[[255]](#footnote-256)

Barraclough credited school history teachers with pioneering the study of world history; disciplinary pressure had provoked immediate innovation. He cited the ‘pioneering effort’ of a group of Surrey history teachers who had recently devised a new General Certificate of Education (GCE) syllabus focusing explicitly on twentieth century world history, and the work of Ministry of Education inspector E.E.Y. Hales in convening conferences to debate and formulate the new subject.[[256]](#footnote-257) Real change, Barraclough argued, was coming from ‘those areas where the recondite speculations of academic history have least echo’ and only then percolating through to university curricula (with a considerable time-lag in the case of traditionalist institutions such as the University of Cambridge).

Demands to broaden the geographical outlook of history syllabi were accompanied by efforts to extend its temporal scope. Some history teachers believed that the best way to make their subject relevant to the next generation was quite literally to bring it up to date. Amongst reformers, there was widespread recognition that contemporary history was intimately connected to world history. The *Handbook for History Teachers* noted that the preceding decade had ‘witnessed a powerful movement to introduce twentieth century history into the syllabuses of secondary schools […] and the enthusiasts for such work recognized that any effective study of the century must be global in perspective’.[[257]](#footnote-258) A DES publication, *Towards World History,* was unequivocal in its analysis; it informed teachers that

twentieth century history *is* world history, with the result that the new and considerable attention which our schools are beginning to give to it appears to be providing the catalyst by which the insularity of our syllabuses may be dissolved [emphasis in original].[[258]](#footnote-259)

Both publications expressed hope that tolerance and international understanding would be promoted by this decline in historical insularity.

Implicit within such statements of support for contemporary history was a denial of global interconnectedness prior to the twentieth century – a denial which might be understood as a forgetting and erasure of the relations of imperial domination which characterised British relations with non-European polities from at least the sixteenth century onwards.[[259]](#footnote-260) Especially when viewed from the perspective of the colonised, the British empire could not be identified as anything other than an extractive, exploitative experiment in the global projection of power, in which the metropole was enriched at the expense of the very humanity of those it created as racial ‘Others’.[[260]](#footnote-261) These silences speak to a broader failure of critical engagement with histories of empire within the new discipline of world history.

Texts promoting the discipline to schools frequently claimed to mark a break with the past in their descriptions of empire. Various contributions to the 1970 collection *New Movements in the Study and Teaching of History* reflect this aspiration. ‘In so far as our pupils have studied non-European civilisations in the past’, wrote Ballard, ‘they have generally looked at them “down the end of a European drain-pipe, or from the quarter-deck of a British man-of-war”’.[[261]](#footnote-262) His fellow contributor Charles L. Hannam, a teacher and historian, critiqued existing syllabi in which ‘foreigners [appeared] on the scene to be defeated, enslaved and exploited for the glory of one’s own group’.[[262]](#footnote-263)

By contrast, D.C. Watt’s contribution broke the mould by questioning the identification of world history with the expansion of international knowledge and understanding.[[263]](#footnote-264) Watt wrote anxiously of the capacity of courses in twentieth century world history to found a powerful new national(ist) mythology by selecting the Second World War as their end date. His explanation is worth quoting in full:

These “finest hours” of British democracy in their external and domestic political aspects, are thus made the culminating point in British history, the history of a once great power. Nostalgia, romanticism, escapism on both an individual and national scale, linger and return to the period of the Second World War. Thereafter all is the drab and humiliating decline to the present.[[264]](#footnote-265)

Watt’s analysis here anticipated the work of later scholars, such as Gilroy, who have pointed to the role of the Second World War as the triumphal culmination of the national teleology as a substitute for (and occlusion of) empire.[[265]](#footnote-266) Watt was not entirely correct in his assumption that few curricula in British secondary schools pushed beyond the Second World War; although a 1967 survey of exam boards suggests the outbreak of war was a common end-date for British and European history examination courses, a substantial minority – especially in the fields of world and imperial and Commonwealth history – extended their coverage at least into the 1950s.[[266]](#footnote-267) This trend would become more prominent as time went on.[[267]](#footnote-268) Nevertheless, the Second World War did occupy an outsize role in the teaching of many schools. Teachers’ articles in the professional journals of the era contained both critical and neutral accounts of the War as a curricular staple.[[268]](#footnote-269) Contemporary examination papers drawn from varying levels of assessment suggest that questions on the war were a reliable staple; teachers were encouraged to devote more time to the topic as a form of safety net for their students.[[269]](#footnote-270)

Watt’s observations on the failure of historians to come to terms with the realities of British imperial ‘decline’ ultimately led him to reject some forms of world history.[[270]](#footnote-271) He argued that world history syllabi should focus exclusively on those areas least at risk from historians’ persistent habit of racist caricature: western and central Europe, Soviet and eastern Europe, and the United States. Watt might be accused of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, but his concerns were vindicated by the work of many of his contemporaries. Within *New Movements* itself, there is evidence of an unwillingness to break with the language of biological and cultural determinism in the writing of world history. Ballard set the tone by characterising ‘western civilisation’ as historically exceptional in its ‘immense potential for change’.[[271]](#footnote-272) He accepted that the supposed changelessness of non-European cultures ‘can be exaggerated’, but nonetheless posited that the study of any period within the past thousand years of ‘eastern civilisation’ could provide a reliable guide to the rest of this history. Thus, binary categories of east and west were used to mask immense cultural plurality, and ultimately to reify imagined cultural essences as the origins of an inescapable historical destiny.

Hannam’s explanation of the historical process was only marginally more complex; he critiqued the identification of western culture with ‘civilisation’ (defined against eastern ‘barbarism’) but was prepared to justify assumptions of western superiority in the sphere of ‘technological progress’.[[272]](#footnote-273) Hannam then went on to describe ‘the races of Africa, the Melanesians and Polynesians, the modern Indians of South and North America and the Eskimos’ as civilisations which had lost their ‘powers of expansion’. This formulation hints at an understanding of the essentially contingent nature of history but falsely posits an unchanging eastern culture. Even if read in the most charitable light – that the capacity for change had not been lost *by* societies but rather lost *to* the trauma of colonisation – the passive phraseology (“lost” rather than “taken”) seems calculated to obscure this historical reality. Embedded within the work of Hannam, Ballard, and of several others included in the collection was a cultural chauvinism which – despite explicit statements to the contrary – takes a specifically western European and North American model of socio-economic and political change as the standard by which all societies must be judged. Thus, the world was divided into ‘primitive’ societies (characterised by absence and inadequacy) and ‘fully civilised’ societies assumed to have reached the apex of historical development.[[273]](#footnote-274)

World history was self-consciously positioned as an alternative to the old school of imperial and Commonwealth history suited to the shifting power dynamics and ideological sensibilities of the post-war world. In some ways, this entailed projecting the present backwards onto the past. World history offered a narrative in which Britain was a secondary or supporting character and in which the empire largely disappeared from view. Unfortunately, as Watts so presciently observed, the disappearance of empire did not entail the disappearance of an imperial ideological framework. In fact, as we will see, the loss of opportunities for the critical study of empire and Commonwealth helped to reaffirm some of the foundational assumptions of the ‘old school’ world history set out to supplant.

**Uptake of World History**

All evidence suggests that world history was a small but rapidly growing field from the mid- to late-1960s. The initial breakthrough seems to have been precipitated by the growing governmental preoccupation with ‘the average and less able aged eleven and above, the overwhelming majority of whom left school with no qualifications’.[[274]](#footnote-275) Cannadine, Keating, and Sheldon have pointed to the impact of the 1963 Newsom Report, which investigated the teaching of students ‘of average and less than average ability,’ upon school history teaching.[[275]](#footnote-276) Newsom argued that ‘young school leavers’ (those leaving secondary education at 15) were chiefly concerned with the practical value of their studies. As such, the report called for teachers to stress the contemporary relevance of history; syllabi needed to illuminate ‘the world in which they [the students] live, not only the world in which their fathers were born’.[[276]](#footnote-277) This was an era defined by global interconnectedness – the problems of contemporary history were ‘world problems’.

Newsom was accompanied by significant revisions to public examination practice. The old system of GCE examinations, divided into Ordinary (‘O’) and Advanced (‘A’) Levels, was only designed for the country’s top academic performers.[[277]](#footnote-278) Those students identified as ‘weak’ by their teachers – disproportionately concentrated in secondary modern and comprehensive schools – were frequently debarred from even sitting these exams. In an increasingly competitive job market, such widespread exclusion from qualifications was no longer sustainable. The Certificate of Secondary Education (hereafter CSE) was therefore introduced in 1965, with the aim of offering a less academically demanding alternative to O Levels (a CSE Grade I was equivalent to an O Level pass).

The arrival of the CSE had a substantial impact on the teaching of history. This was especially true of secondary modern schools, for which it was originally designed, and subsequently the lower streams of comprehensives. The connection formulated in the Newsom Report between world history and the teaching of pupils of ‘average and less than average ability’ was borne out in the new examination syllabi. The teaching of world history had previously been disincentivised by limitations on resources: schools lacked the funds to invest in new textbooks, while age-appropriate materials on world history were few and far between. The introduction of the CSE created a new market in learning resources, providing teachers with a rare justification to supplement their shelves and vary their courses.[[278]](#footnote-279)

Most regional boards introduced at least an optional paper on world history at CSE level, which generally met with a rapid increase in uptake. In East Anglia a world history syllabus (‘British, European and World History 1870-Present Day’) was first examined in 1966, attracting just 144 entries.[[279]](#footnote-280) By 1971, the total number of entrants had reached 1,167, just 49 shy of the Board’s most popular paper (‘[British] Economic and Social History 1640-Present Day’). These statistics display world history’s potential to rival and even surpass traditional, British history syllabi in popularity within just half a decade of teaching. East Anglia was fairly typical of regional examining boards; others showed slower or faster speeds of increase in uptake, but the general trend was towards the growing prominence of world history.[[280]](#footnote-281) Roger Longden’s 1972 survey of the introduction of world history into English secondary schools reveals that this trend was particularly marked in regions in which advocates for the field sat on syllabus-development panels.[[281]](#footnote-282) An especially strong concentration of such teachers on the East Midlands Regional History Panel resulted in the creation of world history as a compulsory subject for examination classes. All candidates sitting for the region’s Mode I history exam (a qualification based on an externally mandated syllabus and examination) were obliged to offer a one-hour General Paper on ‘Britain and World Affairs in the Twentieth Century’, comprising 30% of the available marks.[[282]](#footnote-283) A total of 436 students sat for the paper in its first year, increasing to 1819 in 1968.

There were early indications of resistance to this mandate within individual schools. Longden explains that the years 1965-1968 witnessed a ‘steady rise in the number of submissions’ from schools offering CSE Mode II (under which an internally devised curriculum was subject to external examination) and Mode III (under which an internally devised and assessed curriculum was externally moderated).[[283]](#footnote-284) The curricula proposed by schools following Modes II and III often concentrated upon British social and economic history.[[284]](#footnote-285) In the face of mounting backlash, the East Midlands Regional History Panel rescinded the Mode I requirement for the study of world history in 1968. Nevertheless, world history remained on the curriculum as an optional module, and by 1969 was still attracting more than three times the candidature of any other paper.

Regional variation was even more important as a determinant of the availability of world history for GCE students. In general, O Level exam boards were much slower to incorporate world history than their CSE equivalents.[[285]](#footnote-286) Boards that did try to branch out by including world history papers experienced a more limited uptake of the new syllabi. The University of London was amongst the first O Level Boards to offer world history. This was the result of determined lobbying of Peter Teed and Charlotte Waterlow (the same Surrey history teachers who succeeded in attracting the praises of Geoffrey Barraclough).[[286]](#footnote-287) Teed and Waterlow developed a course entitled ‘World Affairs 1919 to the Present Day’, which was adopted for the 1965 and 1966 exam seasons as ‘a special paper for a small number of schools’.[[287]](#footnote-288) It received 764 entries, while more than 22,000 candidates sat the Board’s most popular paper (a two-part course consisting of ‘English History 871-1763’ and ‘European History 1517-1763’).

The following year, the University of London added an additional, modern and contemporary English and European history paper (‘English History 1763-1955’ and ‘European History 1763-1954’).[[288]](#footnote-289) Most students who had previously studied the medieval and early modern English and European paper switched across to the new module, though small numbers may have transferred to the world history option. By 1971, 17,639 candidates were sitting the paper in modern and contemporary English and European history, the traditional medieval and early modern paper was attracting 2,162 students, and world history was taken by 3,017. These statistics indicate that there was a widespread belief in the need for curricular change amongst O Level history teachers. The choice of new syllabi, when set in the context of contemporary debates positing contemporary and world history as solutions to a ‘relevance’ crisis, suggest that these changes were motivated by the perception that traditional teaching lacked a meaningful connection to the changing world inhabited by pupils. Interestingly, it appears that most preferred to add ‘relevance’ to their teaching by moving to modern and contemporary English and European history, rather than their world equivalents. However, the real losers in the competition for candidates were medieval and early modern history.

Entries to the various papers offered by other O Level exam boards display a similar pattern; where world history was introduced, it experienced a rapid increase in uptake, but not necessarily at the expense of existing papers with modern components. Thus, the Associated Examining Board’s O Level world history paper (‘Britain and World Affairs’) climbed from 221 entries in 1966 to 1,910 in 1971.[[289]](#footnote-290) Its rapidly growing popularity did not impact upon the Board’s most popular syllabus (comprising ‘Periods of British History 55 B.C.-1951’ and ‘European [History] 1789-1951’) which increased its own uptake from 4,871 to 5,770, between 1964 and 1971.

It was at A Level that world history had the least impact upon examination courses. At the beginning of the 1970s, three regional Boards (London, Oxford, and Cambridge) did not offer a single A Level syllabus on world history.[[290]](#footnote-291) A third, Southern, offered only a modern and contemporary history course containing some world options, which it was considering withdrawing due to low candidate numbers. At the Associated Examining Board, which did offer a genuine world history paper, uptake was also low. In 1964, just 39 candidates were entered for world history. By contrast, 163 were examined in English history, and 110 in European history (both covering a broad historical sweep from ancient history to the present day). All options experienced substantial growth in candidate numbers over a six-year period, but this growth was unevenly distributed: English history gained 1,074 entrants, European history 1,061, and world history just 329.

There are several plausible explanations for divergent influences of world history on CSE and GCE history. As Cannadine, Keating, and Sheldon have suggested, the arrival of the CSE – especially within comprehensive classrooms – created a new need for history to ‘justify its place in the curriculum by appealing to children across a wide range of ability’.[[291]](#footnote-292) World and contemporary history, with their obvious claims to relevance, were seen as likely candidates to hold the attention of students in mixed-ability classrooms. For teachers in grammar schools, where the GCE dominated, the need for innovation was much less pressing.[[292]](#footnote-293) Resource limitations may have placed a further constraint on teachers of GCE courses. The general rollout of the CSE made investment in new materials non-negotiable for schools teaching this option. History teachers therefore enjoyed a rare opportunity to purchase substantial numbers of new textbooks and teaching aids with a different focus to those previously in use. For teachers of GCE courses, there was no such necessity, and restricted budgets limited their capacity to alter the content of syllabi in any meaningful way.

During this period, responsibility for the curriculum ultimately rested on the shoulders of the individual teacher.[[293]](#footnote-294) Consequently, the particular interests of the teacher and the departmental culture in which they worked both exercised a determining influence over taught content. Contemporaries noted that, while the addition of a member of staff enthusiastic about world history could affect major changes in the school curriculum, the loss of such pioneers could equally prove catastrophic.[[294]](#footnote-295) Grammar schools, in which teachers of GCE students were disproportionately concentrated, were often notable for their conservative institutional culture.[[295]](#footnote-296) Grammars figured (and perhaps continue to figure) in the political imagination either as representations of the meritocratic basis of post-war British society, in which social advance was tied to raw intelligence and hard work, or as the mask behind which elite self-preservation and self-reproduction operated.[[296]](#footnote-297) As such, grammar education has been an ideal around which conservatives have rallied since at least the late 1960s; any attempt to dismantle the grammar system has since been interpreted as an attack on the very foundations of English society and, by extension, of English nationhood.[[297]](#footnote-298) The equation of grammar schools with the defence of tradition has had a concrete effect on teaching practice. As Laura Tisdall notes, grammar schools proved reluctant to teach according to the new values of child-centred education, in contrast to the innovative and experimental approaches taken by secondary modern schools.[[298]](#footnote-299) It might be suggested that a similar process was at play in the vastly divergent uptake of world history examination courses in grammars and secondary moderns.

This would certainly seem to tally with curricular changes in the compulsory first three years of history at secondary level. Curricula in these years were designed to prepare students seeking to continue with history into the examination forms, but the notion of ‘preparation’ was defined broadly. Teachers were conscious that, in many classes, a majority of pupils would finish their historical education at the end of their third year, and adapted their teaching accordingly (usually by stressing the methodological basis of historical study as a transferable skill, or by covering a broad sweep of the past).[[299]](#footnote-300) As a result, there was often little direct relation between the content of history in examination and non-examination classes – meaning that the necessity of resourcing new assessments in the former cannot be considered to have had a clear impact on the latter’s curriculum.[[300]](#footnote-301) Indeed, a 1970 survey into the teaching of history to the eleven to fourteen age group found that, out of 169 heads of department, a majority (88) considered their annual book allowance to be inadequate to their needs.[[301]](#footnote-302) The same enquiry cited a grammar school in which the only resources for non-examination classes consisted of two sets of textbooks dating from 1936 and 1937, ‘both liberally sprinkled with inaccuracies’, as an unfortunate but not atypical example of the consequences of a chronic under-resourcing of history departments.

Nevertheless, the curricula adopted by history teachers in the first three years in secondary modern and comprehensive schools demonstrate a much stronger trend towards the introduction of world history than their grammar school equivalents. The same 1970 study quoted above found that, in grammar schools in the local (Cambridgeshire) region, ‘the most common chronological period would extend from the ancient civilizations to the end of the Stuart period and in some cases proceed a little further into the 18th century’.[[302]](#footnote-303) In practice, this meant that the first year covered ancient history and English history up to 1066, the second year Norman England to the end of the Wars of the Roses, and the third year the Tudor and Stuart period. In the latter, imperial expansion might be mentioned where it impinged upon domestic developments. By contrast, secondary modern schools ‘showed a tendency to cover a wider time span’, with courses extending to the late-nineteenth or even mid-twentieth century. The first year would typically be occupied by a broad sweep up to 1485, the second with a detailed study of the Tudors and Stuarts, and the third year with some aspect of world history. Although the ‘great tradition’ of the British chronological survey remained broadly intact, in secondary moderns at least it was now interrupted by a ‘world perspective’ – at the cumulative moment of the final year of compulsory education, no less.

Interestingly, the Cambridge study found that significantly more teachers in grammar schools (63 percent) were ‘favourable to the demands for more world history’ than those in secondary moderns (52 percent).[[303]](#footnote-304) This disparity might, however, be a function of existing practice; secondary modern teachers were already delivering a substantial quantity of world history and did not believe that further revision was necessary. More significant, perhaps, is the survey’s discovery of a major gap in support on the basis of teachers’ age and experience. While 53 percent of teachers with more than ten years of classroom experience were in favour of introducing more world history, approval increased by seven percent for those teachers with less than five years of experience. It appears that the generational gap between teachers – influenced by what they themselves had learnt at school and training college – could have some impact on the prospects for the introduction of world history within a given school.

**Content of World History in Examination Forms**

Due to their prescriptive nature, examination syllabi can provide some of the best guides to the realities of education at a classroom level. In 1971, a fellowship programme based at London’s School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) offered eight teachers the opportunity to conduct research into the teaching of world history in schools. Their report concluded that curricula in the examination years, following the syllabi set out by regional examination boards, expressed a ‘disappointingly heavy bias towards the history of Europe, international relations and the twentieth century’.[[304]](#footnote-305) In the limited cases where boards pushed past these limits, the result was ‘such a degree of variation in the scope and style of the questions as to suggest a great deal of uncertainty not only about what could be expected from candidates, but about what the examiners themselves wanted’.

Longden’s 1972 research on world history examination syllabi largely affirmed the findings of the report; its survey of contemporary CSE and O Level papers revealed that few expected students to have covered material earlier than the twentieth century.[[305]](#footnote-306) World history was therefore identified with contemporary history in all but a few exceptional cases (the American War of Independence, the French Revolution, the Unification of Italy, and the Unification of Germany all appeared as topics of study in a small number of syllabi). Longden used phrases such as ‘the usual range of twentieth century topics’ and ‘the main political developments of the present century’ to refer to the material specified by world history courses. The implication was clear: topics had quickly become so standardised and calcified that it was assumed that no further elaboration was required. It was as an afterthought, included in parentheses at the tail end of the relevant chapter, that he defined ‘the principal events in twentieth century world history’ as ‘the Russian Revolution, [the Treaty of] Versailles, the Great Depression, [and] the causes of the Second World War’.

All such topics had the potential to be read through a truly global lens, but contemporary learning resources and assessment materials indicate that the emphasis of study remained firmly on the ‘great powers’ – especially western European nations, Germany, the USA, the USSR, and sometimes China and Japan.[[306]](#footnote-307) The example of the study and examination of the Second World War is instructive. The Summer 1965 paper of the University of London’s special syllabus, ‘World Affairs 1919 to the Present Day’, included three questions connected to the Second World War.[[307]](#footnote-308) The first invited candidates to consider connections between the Treaty of Versailles and German resentment: ‘“The peace settlement of 1919 made another European war almost certain.” What facts about the settlement might be said to justify this argument?’. The second asked students to ‘trace the stages’ by which the conflict escalated from the German invasion of Poland to global conflict, while the third demanded consideration of ‘the merits and defects of Franklin D. Roosevelt as leader of the United States in peace and war’. Of these, only the second can be said to have considered the global dimension of the war; even so, its grounding in military and diplomatic history focused attention on the interactions between a limited range of ‘great powers’. An emphasis on the ‘great powers’ – in this instance, the USA and other signatories of the Treaty of Versailles – was reproduced in the other two questions.

Similarly, *World Outlook, 1900-1965: A Study Series*, a 1968 world history course designed for secondary school students preparing for public examinations, viewed the Second World War exclusively through the prism of relations between the ‘world powers’, with an emphasis on Britain and Germany. Close identification with the war aims of the British state was encouraged through the calculated use of collective pronouns. The German invasion of France was described as inaugurating ‘a grim and bleak time when Britain was alone’.[[308]](#footnote-309) Redemption, however, was quick to arrive: ‘fortunately for us’, students were informed, ‘Hitler was having trouble with his own allies’. Such statements encouraged readers to identify themselves with a narrowly defined, threatened national community (‘little England’). They also erased the contributions of the British empire and the imperial dimensions of the conflict itself.[[309]](#footnote-310) In a section on ‘World Strategy’, focus was broadened beyond the European theatre of war to acknowledge the impact upon Asia.[[310]](#footnote-311) Nevertheless, this was narrated exclusively from the perspective of the USA, the USSR, and – most importantly – the United Kingdom. Rather than being seen as historical actors in their own right, Australia and India were presented as ‘threatened and defenceless’, awaiting Churchill’s decision to ‘save’ them from the encroachments of the Japanese army.

Of countries which were not commonly considered ‘great powers’, Israel was unique in occupying its own section of the 1965 special syllabus. This section, entitled ‘the Zionist movement and the emergence and development of Israel’, was perhaps included because of its pertinence to contemporary international relations.[[311]](#footnote-312) The voices of Palestinians were notably silent.[[312]](#footnote-313) The syllabus also mandated the study of

political economics and social problems and developments in Latin America *or* Africa *or* the Middle East *or* the Far East illustrated by particular reference to any one country or area (excluding Commonwealth and Ex-Commonwealth countries) studied in detail [emphasis in original].[[313]](#footnote-314)

By disallowing the study of ‘Commonwealth and Ex-Commonwealth countries’, the Board discouraged explicit acknowledgement of Britain’s colonial past under the rubric of world history. The exclusion of the colonial past was likely a product of the old system of including ‘imperial and Commonwealth’ history as a self-contained paper. It may also have spoken to a desire to divest world history – as an alternative and rival to the ‘imperial and Commonwealth’ history paper – of the imperial*ist* associations of imperial history. Given the terminal decline in candidate numbers for courses in ‘imperial and Commonwealth’ history, the decision to exclude the study of empire from world history courses amounted to the erasure of such history from the curricula in examination forms.

The effacement of British imperialism is all the more significant when one considers the ways in which history teaching was shaped by its heritage. The colonial gaze looking outwards upon the world was implicit in the syllabus’ terminology: descriptors including ‘the Middle East’ and ‘the Far East’ assumed European (especially western European) understandings to be normative.[[314]](#footnote-315) This perspective was reinforced in the choice given to teachers, who were permitted to select Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, or the Far East. The effect was both homogenising and tokenising. Vast regions in the Global South were presented as both educationally equivalent and internally consistent – capable of being exemplified by a single ‘country or area’. Hence, imperial ideology and imperial forgetting co-existed in a single syllabus. They may, in fact, have been mutually reinforcing: in foregoing study of colonialism, the Board relinquished any opportunity to encourage the critical study of its legacies.

By providing teachers with absolute discretion over the country or area to be studied and offering such a broad range of options under one umbrella, the Board virtually guaranteed that exam questions would be inconsistent and unpredictable. In the paper set in the Summer of 1965, only question ten referred to the syllabus option on Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East.[[315]](#footnote-316) Candidates were given a choice: either they could, ‘give an outline of the main problems which have faced *one* of the following since 1919: Mexico; Cuba; Brazil; Argentina [emphasis in original]’, or they could ‘trace the history of French North Africa from 1940’. Students whose teachers had opted for detailed study of Chile, Vietnam, Angola, or Iran – to cite just a few examples from the world of possibilities offered by the syllabus – would have had no opportunity to display their knowledge, and would have been forced to rely on other questions. As such, the topic was a high-risk area of focus for those teaching for examination success. It is likely that teachers would have been discouraged from pursuing it with the same level of commitment as other points on the syllabus.

The criticisms levelled by the SOAS teachers’ fellowship programme – that world history syllabi overemphasised the histories of Europe, international relations, and the twentieth century – applied equally at A Level. The University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (hereafter ‘UCLES’) A Level in History – which remained broadly consistent from 1966 until at least 1974 – is a case in point.[[316]](#footnote-317) The Board’s world history paper (‘World Affairs since 1939’) represented one option amongst twenty-one on offer to candidates. The paper included six discrete sections: regional studies of North America, the Soviet Union, Africa and the ‘Middle East’, Southern Asia and the ‘Far East’, [and] Europe (excluding the USSR), which were complemented by a non-regionally specific thematic section covering ‘international organisations and developments in the economic, social and political fields that have world-wide significance’.[[317]](#footnote-318) In the examination, candidates were expected to answer four questions, of which no more than two were to be drawn from a single section of the syllabus. The minimum number of sections to be studied was therefore two.

The syllabus’ weighting gave some indication of the Board’s priorities – leaving aside the final section on international cooperation, Europe and North America occupied more space on the syllabus than the whole remainder of the globe.[[318]](#footnote-319) Of the European and North American states, the USA and the USSR attracted most attention: the syllabus devoted just three short bullet points to the study of Canada under the rubric of North America, compared to the eight detailed points given to the USA, while the USSR received its own section. All other (regionally focused) sections of the syllabus included at least one bullet point covering the relationships of the USA or the USSR with that region. It was therefore possible, and perhaps even likely, that candidates could choose to be examined exclusively upon their knowledge of the internal histories and external policies of the Cold War ‘superpowers’.

Those who did decide to teach or study the histories of ‘Africa and the Middle East’, or ‘Southern Asia and the Far East’, were directed towards a distinctly colonial understanding by the Board’s guidelines. The syllabus on Africa (itself an insultingly homogenising category of analysis) was bookended by points concerning foreign intervention in the continent (‘the transfer of power since 1945 and its problems’, and ‘Africa and Europe’).[[319]](#footnote-320) This accounted for one quarter of the specified topics. The remainder of the topics on the list were narrated primarily through the lens of post-independence ‘problems’. Bullet points directing candidates to study the ‘economic and social problems of newly emerging African states’, ‘problems of plural societies’, ‘the Republic of South Africa and its race problems’ revealed a patronising attitude which pathologized the continent as a space of permanent, inveterate conflict. No attempt was made to link these conflicts to the legacies of colonial and neo-colonial foreign involvement.

Even when presented with a choice, teachers and students would often opt for topics with an emphasis on the actions and impact of the ‘great powers’ and ‘superpowers’. In 1971, the Associated Examining Board required A Level candidates to choose two papers from a set of four encompassing English history, European history, a series of special subjects (monasticism; English trade and its European background; the ‘Age of Discovery’; the English Revolution; English working-class movements in the nineteenth century; the Russian Revolution; and ‘Africa South of the Sahara’), and options on the USA, the British empire, and ‘Britain and World Affairs 1870-1945’.[[320]](#footnote-321) The latter was primarily focused on the political history of diplomacy and international relations.

There were 2,610 entries for the English and European history papers, which together represented the bulk of the candidates.[[321]](#footnote-322) Other papers with an exclusively English focus (monasticism, the English Revolution, English working-class movements) gained 437 entries. Of the remaining papers, the most and least popular were, in descending order: Britain and world affairs (183 entries); the USA (155); the Russian Revolution (99); the ‘Age of Discovery’ (48); the British empire (29); ‘Africa South of the Sahara’ (7). Teachers and students expressed a clear preference for the safety of international relations, North American, and European topics; tellingly, the most genuinely innovative of the options presented – ‘Africa South of the Sahara’ – attracted by some way the lowest number of entries.

The powerful trend towards specific themes and topics in the study of world history for examination classes was not arbitrary – rather, it was born out of a particular understanding of the twentieth century world and of Britain’s place within it. Cannadine, Keating, and Sheldon have stressed the inadequacy of the old narrative of the national past, ‘which had previously culminated in the nineteenth century era of global greatness’ to an era when those supremacies had apparently vanished.[[322]](#footnote-323) The introduction of world history into school classrooms and its focus upon the category of ‘great power’ and ‘superpower’ was one answer to this predicament. In particular, the dominance of the USA and the USSR within examination syllabi pointed to a shifting sense of historical gravity – the exceptional global influence of these two states was deemed to merit detailed study. As Athena Syriatou highlights in her study of the teaching of such histories in English secondary schools, the notion of Europe as ‘an area in decline’ was baked into syllabi in the early 1970s, reflecting a loss of confidence linked to decolonisation and perceived economic crises.[[323]](#footnote-324)

According to Syriatou, a sense of western European decline filtered into world history syllabi’s discussion of international cooperation and transnational organisations.[[324]](#footnote-325) In 1972, the University Entrance and School Examination Council’s O Level Syllabus D mandated the study of topics including ‘the failure of collective security in the 1930s’ and ‘the causes of war in 1939 and the collapse of Europe, 1939-41’ under the rubric of ‘International Problems since 1931’. This, Syriatou argues, reflected a ‘new way of seeing Europe’. The European past was framed by the spectacular defeat of aspirations for unity and common identity brought about by the Second World War. However, her analysis does not account for the narrativisation of the *post-war* period in history syllabi. Examination courses typically presented the Second World War as a moment of learning, generating a recalibration of international relations. Its horrors were at least partially redeemed by the new era of peace and collective security which they had birthed.

The widespread emphasis on diplomatic history and the history of international relations, common to CSE, O Level, and A Level syllabi alike, was crucial to the construction of this narrative. Course specifications would frequently move straight from discussion of the failure of the League of Nations and the emergence of the Second World War to – in the words of the North Western Secondary Schools Examination Board’s (hereafter ‘NWSSEB’) CSE syllabus – the rise of global ‘interdependence’ and ‘international cooperation’.[[325]](#footnote-326) The Oxford Local Examinations O Level course, by comparison, invited candidates to investigate the growth of international cooperation through the medium of case studies on the ‘Red Cross, Universal Postal Union, the Hague and Geneva Conventions, ILO [International Labour Organisation], [and] disarmament conferences’. The selection and placement of such content told a story of a new era of peace rising from the ashes of the Second World War.

Even the rise of the nuclear age could, with obvious underlying tension, be integrated into this analysis. In the Oxford syllabus, nuclear science was transmuted into an improbable symbol of technological and diplomatic progress; it featured exclusively under the categories of ‘disarmament conferences’ and ‘developments in […] fuel and power’.[[326]](#footnote-327) NWSSEB’s section on the Cold War and nuclear weapons stressed the doctrine of ‘peaceful co-existence’. In both cases, the Boards demonstrated an understanding of history as teleological development. The historiographical framework of liberal imperialism was revived and reinvented for the new world. By investing the march of history with powers of redemption and exculpation, this narrative could alleviate any residual guilt experienced by English people when confronted with the more violent aspects of their past (and present).[[327]](#footnote-328)

**The Schools Council History Project: World History and New Approaches**

The SCHP module on world history, available to students pursuing both CSE and O Level, invited schools to choose two of four ‘Modern World Studies’ (MWS): ‘The Rise of Communist China’; ‘The Move to European Unity’; ‘The Arab-Israeli Conflict’; and ‘The Irish Question’. Laura Carter has characterised MWS as a dramatic break from the dominant mode of world history teaching.[[328]](#footnote-329) SCHP certainly deserves credit for its courage in raising potentially divisive topics with strong contemporary resonance into the spotlight. As Carter points out, MWS ‘honed in thematically’, in contrast to the diplomatic and political focus of many existing world history syllabi. Only one of the four modular options (‘The Move to European Unity’) conceded to this emphasis. However, the MWS’ treatment of imperial history was broadly comparable to that of other world history syllabi of the time.

‘The Move to European Unity’ shared the diplomatic emphasis and teleological narrative framework outlined above. The official textbook interpreted the British orientation towards Europe as symptomatic of imperial decline. The authors were strident in their criticism of British Prime Minister Anthony Eden’s failure to face up to the shifting balance of power in the post-war world; ‘blinded by his belief in the Commonwealth and the illusion of Britain’s Great Power status’, Eden had grossly underestimated the economic value of European unity.[[329]](#footnote-330) ‘This same blindness’ was believed to have led Eden to ‘commit the greatest blunder of his career in the 1956 Suez Crisis’. The textbook identified Suez as a belated flowering of British imperial aspirations – and the moment at which these were revealed as bankrupt. In 1956, ‘Britain was still trying to police the world’, apparently unaware of the illusory nature of its power (as represented by the Commonwealth). The humiliation of retreat in deference to the United States taught the country a fundamental lesson: ‘if being a Great Power meant intervening in other countries’ affairs and getting away with it, then Britain was no longer a Great Power’.

There was a powerful sense of historical inevitability which cut across the authors’ description of twentieth century geopolitics. Their critique of Eden contained an implicit criticism of the Commonwealth as an outdated barrier to the fulfilment of Britain’s European destiny. Politicians could be ‘blind’ to this destiny but could not ultimately avoid the logic of progressive integration.[[330]](#footnote-331) The same teleology governed the ‘disappearance’ of Britain’s empire (a term which sublimates the violent processes of conquest and liberation) and the ‘natural’ transferal of the ‘powerful position Britain had once enjoyed’ to its US ally. The textbook’s narrative was undoubtedly shaped by a need to cater to students of mixed ability (those taking CSEs and those taking O Levels). This might account for some (over)simplification of the historical process. Regardless, the effect was the same: students were given a sense of the past as an inevitable march towards the present. The story here was of national decline redeemed by European integration. To enter the European future, it was necessary to forget the imperial past.

The desire to discard and transcend the era of empire may account for the marginalisation of this history within the other MWS options, despite its undoubted relevance.[[331]](#footnote-332) SCHP resources on the ‘The Irish Question’ displayed a reluctance to speak of Ireland as a colony, or of its domination and subsequent incorporation into Great Britain as a process of colonisation. Instead, the teachers’ guide referred obliquely to England’s ‘relationship’ or ‘involvement’ with Ireland.[[332]](#footnote-333) Likewise, the textbook claimed that the suffering and depopulation of the Great Hunger ‘did more than anything else to embitter Irish attitudes towards England’. Nevertheless, it stopped short of locating the origins of the famine in colonial policy.[[333]](#footnote-334) In this account, the British government was guilty only of an ‘inefficient and ineffective’ *response*. The British empire here featured as what might best be described as an ‘absent presence’.

Imperial history held a similar place in the SCHP-produced textbook on ‘The Arab-Israeli Conflict’. In this case, the text did not shy away from detailing the contribution of British policy to present day violence.[[334]](#footnote-335) However, it once again eschewed explicit mention of empire, imperialism, or colonisation. Authorial commentary habitually reproduced the wording of primary source materials, especially those representing the views of British and French diplomats and politicians (perhaps because such documentation is more readily available to authors based in the United Kingdom). In practice, this entailed a concession to the logic of colonial diplomacy and the rationale for imperial government. The partition of much of south-west Asia was described as a process by which former Ottoman territories were ‘entrusted’ to Britain and France until such a time as ‘its people were ready to govern themselves’.[[335]](#footnote-336) The textbook’s authors took at face value British and French claims to responsible trusteeship; the *exercise* of such powers was called into question, but their fundamental legitimacy remained uncontested.

It is worth noting that Modern World Studies was widely regarded as the ‘most problematic’ section of the SCHP course.[[336]](#footnote-337) Teachers tended to feel that insufficient time was allocated to the module. Consequently, lessons were forced to caricature, oversimplify, and to sacrifice the critical source analysis which was supposed to be a hallmark of the SCHP approach. Some teachers felt obliged to revert to a traditional, talk-and-chalk model, summarised as ‘here is the country, here are the facts’. Others adopted a narrative, story-telling approach in order to convey the necessary information while retaining student engagement. SCHP noted that the ‘derring-do and ample carnage’ of the ‘The Arab-Israeli Conflict’ contributed to its initial appeal amongst teachers – especially those working with ‘lower’ or ‘mixed-ability’ groups. Needless to say, by treating real people as characters in an adventure story, such teaching had a tendency to dehumanise and to distance. In this context, opportunities for sustained consideration of individual aspects of the topics – including their imperial dimension – were few and far between. The textbooks and teachers’ resources may well have reflected this compressed timeframe.

Neither the formal resources produced to support MWS, nor classroom practice, seem to have diverged substantially from the approach to imperial history displayed in other world studies courses. The MWS’ most direct references to the empire tended to posit it as a barrier to Britain’s historical destiny – best forgotten or confined to the margins of history. Where MWS truly broke new ground was in its application of SCHP’s methodological approach to the module’s coursework component. SCHP valorised pupil-led, evidence-based inquiry. Independent thought was – in theory at least – to be commended rather than penalised. As we have seen, SCHP’s distinctive methodological approach was only inconsistently applied to MWS in a classroom setting. In coursework, however, students were given the freedom to experiment. Both CSE and (unusually) O Level examinations following the SCHP syllabus featured an innovative coursework component. Candidates were expected to follow current events related to a single Modern World Study, and to apply techniques of critical source analysis to contemporary media coverage.[[337]](#footnote-338) Their observations were written up and submitted for examination in the form of a ‘Modern World Studies Diary’ (MWSD).

There is some evidence that candidates at O Level may have neglected the coursework element of assessment, as it was perceived as a ‘monstrously difficult’ exercise unfairly weighted at a mere 2.5 per cent of the total grade.[[338]](#footnote-339) Nevertheless, teachers who fostered a committed approach to the MWSD amongst their pupils seem to remember it as a positive experience that produced an unparalleled depth of historical understanding. Andy Reid, who taught ‘The Arab-Israeli Conflict’ in a secondary modern school, recalled the ‘life changing’ effect on his pupils of MWSDs completed in the midst of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.[[339]](#footnote-340) As another teacher put it, students were unlikely to walk away from a MWS believing that history is ‘only about the past’.[[340]](#footnote-341) Furthermore, the SCHP’s methodological approach encouraged students to doubt claims to absolute truth, whether presented by ‘history books or newspapers’. At its best, the MWS could empower students to critically appraise narratives presented in a classroom context – including histories of the British empire, which SCHP seemed content to ignore or marginalise in the pursuit of futurity. The ideal of the pupil-as-historian would prove to be the Project’s most enduring – and controversial – legacy, with an influence which spread far beyond the 20 to 25 per cent of candidates following an SCHP syllabus by the close of the 1980s.[[341]](#footnote-342) The ‘new history’, as symbolised by SCHP, would attract considerable backlash from those eager to redress the uncertainty of the present by restoring the singular, uncontested narrative of the great tradition.

**World History for Younger Students**

The first two (and sometimes three) years of secondary education were not driven by the need to attain formal qualifications. In the absence of set exam syllabi and assessment criteria, it is more difficult to reconstruct teaching and learning. Nevertheless, some initial conclusions can be drawn. World history texts written for younger readers tended to stress the exotic or the ‘Other’. Contemporary observers commented on the unfortunate appeal of a ‘picturesque sentimentality’ amongst primary school teachers eager to engage their students’ imaginations in a study of the world beyond the borders of the UK.[[342]](#footnote-343)

The 1971 Institute of Race Relations (hereafter ‘IRR’) publication *Books for Children: The Homelands of Immigrants in Britain* sought to critique the ‘outdated colonial’ perspectives found in many publications targeted at the nine to twelve age group, spanning upper primary and lower secondary classes.[[343]](#footnote-344) Tellingly, however, the IRR itself structured some of its commentary on children’s books in accordance with these stereotypes. A section on children’s books about the Indian subcontinent praised depictions of ‘the old, timeless way of life’ in Pakistan, and ‘primitive life in [rural] India’. Such descriptions had an essentialising effect, portraying Indian and Pakistani societies as ahistorical, immutable, and failing to adhere to European notions of historical ‘development’. Similarly, ‘exotic names’ were uncritically cited as a major source of the appeal of African mythologies amongst younger students.

One of the very few developed schemes of work for lower secondary teachers attempting to integrate world history into the curriculum was the Inner London Education Authority’s World History Curriculum Project (hereafter ILEA and WHCP), which was produced in multiple instalments over the course of the 1970s. The author of a teachers’ guide to WHCP resources on Caribbean history appeared conscious of the need to guard against the distortions of Anglocentric or Eurocentric framings. Its aim was to look ‘at the history of the region […] from the viewpoint of the region itself’; no details of the ‘European background of the people or events’ were slated for inclusion.[[344]](#footnote-345) It was precisely this perspective which attracted the scorn of Raphael Samuel. Samuel contended that world history, seen through non-European eyes and symbolised by the widespread study of ‘pre-colonial civilizations’ (‘as in “Building an Arawak hut”’) offered an escape from the messy imbrication of empire and national identity.[[345]](#footnote-346) The concomitant turn towards ‘intensely local’ history, shorn of its global resonance, provided an alternative means to evade the colonial legacy (a theme which will be developed in Chapter 3). In skirting such histories, ‘Progressive’ educators believed themselves to be militating against the celebration of empire, while also giving space to hitherto marginalised voices.

Of course, colonisation was the principal means by which voices were *made* *subaltern*. By ignoring imperial history, educators stripped their subjects of essential context. As we have previously seen, this practice also removed the opportunity to critically examine the beliefs of the colonisers. Thus, the narrative framing of the WHCP resources on Caribbean history carried an unchecked, unexamined colonial perspective. The notion of linear historical movement between fixed ‘stage[s] of development’ exerted an iron grip on the structure of the writing. This drew directly upon the colonial language of ‘primitive’ and ‘advanced’ societies.[[346]](#footnote-347) Homogeneous racial categories often formed the basis of descriptions of such societies; the Caribs were described as ‘warlike Indians’ and unfavourably contrasted with the supposedly ‘docile’ Arawaks.[[347]](#footnote-348) The planters’ understanding that ‘certain tribes [sic.]’ proved ‘more willing workers’ was presented uncritically.[[348]](#footnote-349)

The Othering judgement contained in the application of the word ‘warlike’ to whole societies (never, crucially, those of Europe), and the authors’ apparent preference for ‘docility’, may go some way to explaining their erasure of histories of resistance. The appropriate colonised and/or enslaved subject was here created as a helpless and tragic victim – a far less challenging figure than that of the resistant agent, who expressed violent resistance to European colonialism. The long history of rebellions by enslaved people and their crucial impact on the economic viability of the plantation system, and even the history of White anti-slavery campaigns in the metropole, were silenced by the student pack’s one-sentence explanation for abolition: ‘towards the end of the eighteenth century people began to feel that the slave trade should be made illegal’.[[349]](#footnote-350)

By contrast, WHCP resources on India presented the country as a stage on which the British were the principal actors. The Project’s teaching packs examined India through the lens of colonial extraction, stressing the significance of Indian crops and labour to the British economy. The apparent willingness of Indian labourers to ‘work for very low wages’ in the production of ‘tea, jute, sugar and indigo’ was presented as a happy discovery made by British adventurers.[[350]](#footnote-351) Any hint of coercion was absent from the text. By contrast, the unpayable debts accrued by peasants ‘persuade[d]’ by the British to grow indigo were portrayed as an ‘unfortunate’ accident.[[351]](#footnote-352) The text lauded the qualities of devotion and biddability amongst the colonised. The only mention of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 (‘the Mutiny’) came in the form of a short biography of the Indian soldier Sita Ram, who set himself apart from his peers by ‘remain[ing] loyal to the [East India] Company who had fed and employed him so long’.[[352]](#footnote-353) The use of the term ‘Mutiny’, common in British historical writing, was of course laden with political meaning in and of itself. To describe the events of 1857 as a ‘mutiny’ is to present them as local and marginal in nature – underplaying the mass scale and organisation of rebellion against British rule. Some contemporary texts recognised the ideological work done by the term. Pamela Cardwell’s *The Indian Mutiny* proffered a liberal imperialist narrative in which the rebellion was presented as a bridge between the depredations of ‘John Company’ and the benevolent governance of the Raj.[[353]](#footnote-354) She nevertheless acknowledged the dominant Indian historiographical perspective that these events ‘did not represent a mutiny at all but were really part of India’s struggle for independence’.

The treatment of the colonised and of colonised landscapes as objects, waiting to be acted on by the British, was particularly prominent in the short exercises recommended to pupils pursuing the course. Students were invited to draw a picture of an eighteenth century ‘gentleman’, accompanied by a ‘list of all the Indian servants he might have’. They were also asked to consider whether they believed it ‘a good idea to keep people like the Caribs on a reserve’.[[354]](#footnote-355) Perhaps more disturbingly, other exercises appeared to transpose a similar approach onto the contemporary world. Students were asked to consider the prevalence of famine in India (a fact treated as a purely natural catastrophe, rather than one linked to the extraction or export of staple foods) and to devise possible solutions, including the implementation of population control measures.[[355]](#footnote-356) This neo-Malthusian approach to environmental politics has been used to justify the violence of forced sterilisation campaigns from the Indian subcontinent to North America.[[356]](#footnote-357)

The ILEA appears to have pitched these resources as an initiative well-suited to the needs of racially and culturally diverse student bodies.[[357]](#footnote-358) *Clio,* the officialnewsletter of the ILEA History and Social Sciences Teachers’ Centre, appealed to teachers to recognise the practical realities of London schooling in the 1970s: the world was shrinking, and indeed ‘has come into our classrooms and is sitting down facing us’.[[358]](#footnote-359) Thus, it was reasonable to assume that ‘pupils will be introduced at some point in their school career to the history of sone non-European peoples and cultures’. It was only logical that this education be formalised. The teachers’ guide accompanying the Caribbean teaching pack shows an apparent sensitivity to the feelings of young people of colour. It cautioned educators that although ‘some students may be happy to provide additional materials and information from their own or their parents’ knowledge of the Caribbean’, others may be more ‘sensitive’ – active and enthusiastic participation could not be assumed, and would depend on the individual circumstances and identity of the child.[[359]](#footnote-360) It was hoped that they would judge the situation with care and caution, on a case-by-case basis.

Nevertheless, the experience of minoritised students asked to imaginatively position themselves as a settler with flocks of Indian servants, or as a colonial administrator tasked with reducing the population and confining communities to reservations, must have been one of substantial alienation. The colonial gaze embedded in the WHCP was not simply a by-product of experimental but ill-conceived materials – it was central to the project as a whole. Alongside ‘the liberal aspects’ of creating informed citizens, *Clio* gave one further justification for the inclusion of world history in school syllabi.[[360]](#footnote-361) The journal followed the poet of empire, Rudyard Kipling, in asking ‘what do they know of England who only England know?’ The study of world history had the potential to open students’ eyes to ‘facets of our own history hitherto unidentified’ and convince the young to ‘accord more respect to traditions and institutions which, we discover, are superior to those found elsewhere’.

*Clio* steadfastly denied that such judgements were politically informed. Rather than an expression of jingoism, they were to be considered the logical products of objective, quasi-scientific ‘national self-appraisal’.[[361]](#footnote-362) The notion of British national superiority was thus naturalised: only deviations from this normative judgement would be considered as ideology or propaganda. The continual use of collective pronouns (‘we’, ‘us’) is also telling. They contained within them an assumption of a homogeneous national community. ‘Other people’s traditions’ – including, presumably, the perspectives offered by young people of colour – were to be praised for their ‘enriching contribution’ to British national life. But it was precisely these cultural differences which doomed communities to remain ‘other people’ – external to the nation and to its mooted glory.

WHCP embodied some of the central flaws of the world history project as a whole: for all its claims to revolutionise the content of history teaching, the core of the historical narrative was retained largely intact. World history was often national history, writ large and shorn of imperial entanglement. Alternatively, it could offer a caricatured foreign perspective as an escape from the examination of painful histories of empire (and its domestic impacts). By erasing the history of empire, world history removed opportunities for critical discussion. This may well have been reflected in world history’s reaffirmation of imperial historiographical perspectives, albeit on a different stage.Over the coming decade, some history teachers would exhibit a more sustained engagement with the classroom experiences of racially Othered young people. They could seek to develop an educational paradigm which valorised multiple cultural identities under a broad definition of nationhood, and to embed teaching practices which would avoid causing pain to racially minoritized young people – with variable results.[[362]](#footnote-363) The critique of assimilationist discourses and their sometime disavowal in favour of a contested and controversial ‘multicultural’ educational vision will be the subject of the following chapter.

# 3. The Young Warriors:Race and Resistance in Education, 1965-1985

*It looks as if the old history syllabi are disappearing and a new generation of teachers has established itself, which is no longer prepared to grow grey in the service of the Tudors.*[[363]](#footnote-364) **Charles Hannam, 1978.**

**Chapter Summary**

The following chapter details the challenge presented to dominant narratives of empire by students from colonised backgrounds. Downwardly racialised communities viewed historical understanding as a key foundation of political identity and anti-racist resistance. Young people of colour received a historical education outside of the state education system, via community organisations and intergenerational conversation. This equipped them to challenge received knowledge within the formal classroom environment. In so doing, students of colour educated their peers. Depending on the setting, these interventions could be variously interpreted as helpful or disruptive. Teachers initially responded to the presence of students of colour with an assimilationist policy. Over time, a number of other approaches (Black Studies, multiculturalism, anti-racism) produced curricular reform. In some cases, these responded to demands made by people of colour, in others, they were imposed as a strategy of containment. Once again, the traditional core of the English history curriculum remained intact during these years. However, some schools instituted genuinely radical modes of historical education which brought empire under a critical analytical lens. The imposition of the National Curriculum must be read as a product of these experiments.

As Tariq Modood and Stephen May have detailed, the timeline of children’s migration must be considered to be distinct from that of adults.[[364]](#footnote-365) Men of working age were usually the first in their families to migrate from Commonwealth countries to the UK. A pattern was established whereby a man would shoulder the burden of initial economic precarity in the new country, find work, and later encourage his spouse and children to join him under the family reunification conditions built into British immigration policy. Thus, the presence of a substantial minority of children of African-Caribbean and Asian heritage within British schools was only truly observable from the mid-1960s onwards, with higher numbers in primary than secondary education.[[365]](#footnote-366) In 1961, there were 46,000 ‘immigrant’ children in primary schools and just 33,000 in secondary schools. These numbers increased rapidly; five years later, the equivalent numbers were 100,000 in primary and 49,000 in secondary education.[[366]](#footnote-367)

In 1989, Ambalavaner Sivanandan was asked to summarise the history of educational policies from the 1950s onwards, in relation to ‘Black people in Britain’.[[367]](#footnote-368) Black was here used in its political sense; ‘political blackness’ sought to identify and build common cause between all those subject to racist discrimination (including, most commonly, British African-Caribbean and South Asian communities). ‘Policies is too big a word’, Sivanandan answered.[[368]](#footnote-369) In his experience, there was no ‘coherent, systematic body of thought’ concerning the education of Black children. As subsequent research has reflected, the response of the education system to the presence of ‘immigrant’ children in schools (so called regardless of actual immigration status) was piecemeal andreactive – driven by prejudiced understandings of events in ‘individual localities in relatively small numbers of schools’.[[369]](#footnote-370) In practice, this usually meant localities within Britain’s largest urban areas - especially London, which was then home to half of all ‘immigrant’ children.[[370]](#footnote-371) Students of colour were problematised by the deficit model of education, which viewed them as lacking essential characteristics which made their White peers educable. Posited deficiencies included culture (especially family structure and behavioural norms), language, and intelligence (measured by intelligence quotient, or IQ). The fear of students defined ‘primarily in terms of underachievement’ created a perceived need for dispersal and containment.[[371]](#footnote-372)

According to Olivier Esteves, the integration of immigrants into a reified national ‘way of life’ was one of the defining political concerns of the 1960s, and the education system its front line.[[372]](#footnote-373) Government directives encouraged teachers to assimilate young immigrants into a hegemonic understanding of Britishness/Englishness (concepts which, as Esteves notes, were ill-distinguished).[[373]](#footnote-374) This policy was often couched in a language of benevolent, universalist paternalism; the cultural and linguistic specificity of immigrant children was seen as contradicting or undermining a wider logic of integration played out ‘through comprehensive schooling (social class integration) or co-educational schooling (gender integration)’.[[374]](#footnote-375) Thus, Circular 7/65, a 1965 DES directive on ‘The Education of Immigrants’, stressed that education in ‘our way of life’ was the only means by which immigrant children could ‘enjoy all the opportunities available’ to their peers.[[375]](#footnote-376) The logical extension of such attitudes was bussing – the policy of dispersal of young people of colour, predominantly of South Asian descent, across schools over a wide geographical area, in order to dilute their presence in individual schools. ‘Banding’ (a system designed to create ‘mixed-ability’ schools, which was accused of employing quotas drawing on racist categories of intelligence) and the confinement of pupils of African-Caribbean heritage to ‘Educationally Sub-normal’ (ESN) schools formed part of the same logic.

The category of the ‘immigrant’ was silently racialised. Nicole M. Jackson has linked the policy of dispersal to racial Othering, and to the construction of downwardly racialised people as ‘perpetual “immigrants”’.[[376]](#footnote-377) Jackson noted that immigrant White children, regardless of linguistic ability, were given automatic admittance to neighbourhood schools in the same fashion as their British-born, White peers. In practical terms, and in defiance of the explanation of immigrant status issued by DES, which defined the ‘immigrant child’ as ‘one born abroad or whose parents had lived in the United Kingdom for not more than ten years’, *all* White children were thus treated as citizens.[[377]](#footnote-378) By contrast, ‘immigrant’ was often used as a catch-all designation for children of colour, regardless of place of birth or citizenship status.

In truth, those who arrived in the United Kingdom from then-Commonwealth countries before 1971 held the legal status of British subjects, and often demonstrated an ambivalent identification with Britishness based on colonial ties.[[378]](#footnote-379) As successive governments imposed restrictions on New Commonwealth migration to the United Kingdom, these migrants found themselves pushed towards an (often unanticipated) commitment to permanent settlement. From the 1970s onwards, the comparatively greater freedom of movement afforded to secondary immigrants (spouses; children; and other dependants) resulted in family reunification and a new generation of children being born to migrant parents in the UK.[[379]](#footnote-380) There was a contradiction here. If young people of colour were identified as eternally and essentially external to the national community then assimilationism was doomed from the very beginning. In this light, assimilation seems to have served as a form of damage control, intended to manage a ‘problem’ – the presence of former colonial subjects in the imperial metropole – which was not, at first, imagined to be permanent. The very existence of people of colour in the United Kingdom was viewed with hostility, as a contingent and temporary phenomenon.

The integrationist logic of early government directives on ‘immigrant’ children balanced an assertion of the supremacy of British values and the national ‘way of life’ with a recognition of young ‘immigrants’’ potential pedagogical value. Circular 7/65 envisaged a future in which teachers would have the knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish the ‘successful assimilation’ of immigrant children into the dominant culture. ‘At the same time’, it argued,

the presence of immigrant children in the school can be effectively used to encourage other children to learn more about the history and geography of the Commonwealth and other countries from which the immigrant children have come. The schools have much to gain, too, by encouraging children from overseas to take an active part in lessons which are concerned with their own countries.[[380]](#footnote-381)

Foreign cultures were valorised insofar as their representation might support the education of White children. In presenting such cultures as lessons available for the consumption of White students, the text initiated a process of objectification; ‘culture’, far from representing the complex totality of lived experience of a child and their community, was reduced to a static, essentialised entity, to be defined by the preconceptions and priorities of government and/or teachers implementing their directives.

The Central Advisory Council for Education’s 1967 report on *Children and their Primary Schools* (the Plowden Report) reiterated the recommendation that primary schools with a ‘substantial intake of immigrant children’ might use their cultural resources to ‘enrich the school’s geographical and historical studies’.[[381]](#footnote-382) Plowden differed from previous directives by emphasising that sensitive representations of foreign cultures might improve classroom race relations and develop immigrant children’s sense of self-worth. However, its logic remained firmly integrationist; a teacher’s knowledge of, and respect for, a child’s ‘previous environment’, was presented as an instrument necessary to build the trust required to ‘prepare them for life in a different one’. Once again, cultural differences would be valorised only insofar as they could be confined to the past (history) or to distant lands (geography) – and hence excluded from the mainstream of contemporary British life. More critical readings might also suggest that the acculturation recommended here was expected to teach foreign-born children something about their subordinate role within British society (service to the majority community). Circular 7/65 and the Plowden Report both focused on cultural difference as the major problem afflicting racially minoritised communities. We can again observe an erasure of the important reality of racial discrimination in favour of a euphemistic problematic of ‘immigration’.

The official silence on educational racism could not stop the communities affected from protesting the injustices they observed in the classroom. In 1971, Bernard Coard released his seminal work, *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-normal in the British School System*, which identified the disproportionate enrolment of Black students in ESN schools. The confinement of West Indian pupils to such institutions was racially motivated and imposed severe constraints on the educational attainment and job prospects of those affected. Coard treated the ESN scandal as a particularly egregious symptom of the broader malaise of institutional racism. He argued that children of African-Caribbean heritage, especially boys, were set up to fail by a combination of three factors:

Low expectations on his part about his likely performance in a white-controlled system of education; low motivation to succeed academically because he feels the cards are stacked against him; and low teacher expectations, which affect the amount of effort expended on his behalf by the teacher and also affect his own image of himself and his abilities.[[382]](#footnote-383)

As Paul Warmington notes, Coard’s work inverted the ‘deficit’ thesis which had hitherto informed educational approaches to young people of colour.[[383]](#footnote-384) Rather than locating this ‘deficit’ within Black communities and individuals, Coard placed it within the education system itself. He argued that the education system denied racially minoritised youth the cultural and social affirmation afforded to their White peers. The resulting psychological damage was observable in their ‘negative self-image’.[[384]](#footnote-385)

Significantly, Coard’s analysis of the systematic failure of education was addressed to Black parents. The lingering imperialist influences on curricula in former British colonies in the Caribbean had trained the older generation to view Britain (and often, more specifically, England) as both motherland and crucible of civilisation.[[385]](#footnote-386) As Kehinde Andrews suggests, those who had come to the UK as adults ‘had little reason to doubt the quality of the education offered, as their only experience of British schooling was the elite private schools in the Caribbean’.[[386]](#footnote-387) In this context, it is easy to see why some within the community experienced a sense of inter-generational disconnect.[[387]](#footnote-388) Andrews stresses that Black parents were not blind to the experiences of their children. Indeed, the publication of Coard’s book would not have been possible without the support given by the Caribbean Education and Community Workers’ Association, which counted parents amongst its members.[[388]](#footnote-389) Nevertheless, *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-normal in the British School System* certainly spread awareness of the issues faced by Black pupils. It acted as a powerful rallying cry amongst those who stood on the frontlines of the fight against racism in 1970s Britain.

**‘Britain is my Home, but Africa is Part of my Heritage’*:* The Black Education Movement Writes Black History**

The Black Education Movement (BEM) emerged in response to educational racism. The BEM is an umbrella term used to encompass the numerous self-help initiatives which appeared in education during this period, ranging from opposition to bussing, banding, and ESN schooling, to the creation of supplementary schools. The latter responded directly to the failings of the education system by offering Black-led teaching exclusively for Black children. As Andrews has noted, the term ‘Black’ was not used consistently across the movement. The Black Parents Movement, which emerged from the BEM, claimed to organise in defence of the ‘black population of Caribbean, African and Asian origin’.[[389]](#footnote-390) This statement embraced the concept of ‘political blackness’. Nevertheless, the group drew on a primarily African and Caribbean membership and used the African American struggle as a primary point of reference.

There was much that was specific to the educational struggles of Britain’s African-Caribbean communities. For example, and as Coard’s work made clear, confinement to ESN schooling was mainly perpetrated against West Indian children. Strategies of resistance were moulded by this specificity.[[390]](#footnote-391) Supplementary schooling – one of the key achievements of the BEM – was an almost exclusively African-Caribbean project. Such schools saw the construction of Black identity as a core element of their mission. The pedagogy of identity formation drew heavily on representations of a common history, in which African heritage was strongly emphasised. In this sense, emergent identities can be described as politically Black, perhaps, but not ‘politically black’. By virtue of the above, my own use of the word Black will be limited to individuals of African descent, except in cases where a politically black identity was claimed by an individual or group.

Representations of the past have often been theorised as important foundations for personal and collective identity.[[391]](#footnote-392) It is therefore unsurprising that the study of history should find itself as a focal point for Black organising. Coard himself described the demoralisation and poor self-esteem which followed the Black child’s discovery, in school, that ‘all the great men of history’ were apparently White.[[392]](#footnote-393) The anti-racist campaigner Ann Dummett associated the historical erasure of people of colour with notions of ‘imperialist destiny’.[[393]](#footnote-394) Such narratives were laughably – and dangerously – out of touch with the contemporary geopolitical reality, in which pupils found themselves ‘citizens of a small country with very few overseas territories’. In this context, the ideology of White supremacist imperial destiny was likely to turn inward, addressing itself towards those ‘citizens of former Empire countries’ who had made their homes in the English metropole. White young people were being educated to despise their peers. Racially minoritised young people were being educated to despise themselves.

Ian Baucom has argued that English national identity divested itself of imperial resonances in the post-war world.[[394]](#footnote-395) By insisting on a strict separation between Englishness and empire, nationalists were able to imagine English nationality as White property, free of the global entanglements bequeathed by empire (the Commonwealth; mass migration). As Jackson has observed, the forgetting of empire threatened the lives and identities of migrants from former colonies.[[395]](#footnote-396) These migrants had not ‘entered the Mother Country in a vacuum’ – their very presence in the United Kingdom was a legacy of the political, economic, and cultural bonds between colony and metropole. To erase imperial history was to challenge their right to claim Britishness/Englishness, whether as personal identity or as citizenship status.

Many chose to resist by drawing attention to the ways in which ‘old imperial relationships’ remained key determinants of their lives in the metropole.[[396]](#footnote-397) The movement was encapsulated in the simple slogan, put forward by Ambalavaner Sivanandan – ‘we are here because you were there’.[[397]](#footnote-398) If, as Sivanandan argued, colonialism and immigration were ‘part of the same continuum’, so too was racism. Justice for people of colour in the UK could only emerge from recognition of the imperial histories which had led them there, and of the imperial foundations of the discrimination which they faced. As a result, historical education became the ‘crux of Black parent-activism’.[[398]](#footnote-399) The role of the BEM, then, was to be one of historical restitution. It would restore a sense of pride to Black young people, rooted in knowledge of a rich Black heritage. It would clarify for them the reasons for their presence in the United Kingdom, and their right to claim Britishness if they so desired. The movement’s preoccupation with history was socially and politically engaged: there was no sense in claiming space for Black people in the historical record if their present deeds went undocumented. The Black political subject should operate with an understanding of the past and an eye on the future, intimately aware of their own historicity.

The BEM developed in dialogue with broader radical educational movements.[[399]](#footnote-400) Mathew Thomson has characterised the 1970s as a decade marked by the increasing prominence of issues of childhood freedom.[[400]](#footnote-401) The movement for children’s rights mobilised a generation who wished to ‘translate the dreams of sixties radicalism into practical achievement’. Its proponents took a libertarian approach to education which drew on the work of theorists such as Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire. They challenged the traditional roles of the teacher: as a representation of authority and discipline, and as the provider of a unitary, uncontested form of knowledge. Equally, traditional constructions of childhood were brought into question. Children were considered to bear independent political agency and the full rights of citizens (a radical idea at a time when corporal punishment was both legal and acceptable when directed against minors). Children themselves were by no means idle in this movement. Many seized the opportunity to claim power and autonomy, especially within classroom settings; this was a golden era of child-authored print culture, much of which encouraged the authors’ peers to protest objectionable conditions in schools.[[401]](#footnote-402) Acts of defiance could range from disrupting lessons perceived to be boring or useless, to the organisation of strikes under the banner of school-students’ unions.

There is evidence that connections with children’s rights campaigns were sought and sustained by individuals active in the BEM. Notably, Bernard Coard contributed an article on racism in education to the inaugural volume of *Children’s Rights,* one of the major proponents of children’s political agency.[[402]](#footnote-403) Similarly, the catalogue of the Caribbean bookshop and publishing house New Beacon Books featured texts which addressed themes of ‘pupil power’. Its 1976 listing for ‘Supplementary Stories and History’, designed to support the education of Black students in supplementary schools, included Billy Colville and Dave Marson's *Fall in and Follow* *Me* – a play about the children’s strikes of 1911.[[403]](#footnote-404) *Fall in and Follow Me* was conceived as an exploration of the ‘instincts and identities of children’.[[404]](#footnote-405) It was designed to be performed by young people and rewritten in the process, in accordance with their own experiences and priorities. Carolyn Steedman famously identified children’s creative self-expression, and especially autobiographical writing, as a preeminent pedagogical tool in post-war British classrooms.[[405]](#footnote-406) She attributed its rise to the psychological preoccupations of child-centred learning, the political framework of social democracy, and the latter’s corollary – mass education. Autobiographical narration valorised the ‘lived experience of working-class people’, confirming that the subaltern could, indeed speak. In so doing, the subject was expected to attain new forms of (political) self-knowledge, and to move towards a more engaged citizenship.[[406]](#footnote-407)

Rob Waters observes that this pedagogy was deeply enmeshed with the politics of secondary decolonisation.[[407]](#footnote-408) The term ‘secondary decolonisation’, as coined by Richard Drayton, refers to the long struggle against the legacies of colonialism, in recognition of the ‘partial and ambivalent victory’ of formal, political independence.[[408]](#footnote-409) The (White) radical teacher Chris Searle was known for his support of children’s self-narration as a means of individual and collective empowerment. Searle spent much of his career in the racially diverse areas of London’s East End and northeast Sheffield. He also worked with the revolutionary movements of Mozambique and Grenada. These experiences all contributed to Searle’s commitment to opposing racism in education, and to his interest in the politics of b/Blackness. As Waters argues, Searle was in some sense a student of ‘black radical reformulations of the role of education’.[[409]](#footnote-410) Searle’s politics were inflected with the BEM’s radical critique of the foundational racism of the British education system and its understanding of young people as agents of change. Children’s writing was envisaged as an arena in which Black identity – and agency – could be negotiated and claimed. Black history, as a story of both oppression and defiance, was central to this endeavour.

**Supplementary Schooling**

As Andrews has argued, supplementary schools maintained a complex relationship with mainstream schooling. Most taught curricula which ‘challenged mainstream concepts and practices’ and there was a strong focus on the raising of self-esteem and political consciousness through the transmission of Black history and culture.[[410]](#footnote-411) At the same time, supplementary schools committed themselves to raising the educational attainment of Black young people according to parameters set by the state. In practice, these two apparently contradictory and competing aims were often easily reconciled. Some supplementary schools held separate classes covering the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy, which mainstream education required but failed to provide, and some form of ‘Black Studies’. Others approached literacy and numeracy through a ‘Black Studies’ lens; in one such school, dictation exercises encouraged students to claim ancient Egypt as part of their own heritage, in contravention of an English historical tradition, dominant in the classroom, which referred to Egypt as ‘part of the Mediterranean world’, excising it from the African continent and claiming the Egyptian people as ‘honorary Europeans’.[[411]](#footnote-412) Spelling tests included the words ‘Benjamin Banneker’, ‘liberty’, and ‘declaration of independence’.[[412]](#footnote-413)

Within either model, the communication of Black history was vitally important. Even the nomenclature attached to supplementary education indicates a powerful sense of historical grounding. The most cursory survey of a directory of London supplementary schools, compiled in 1987, shows schools named for an extraordinary variety of prominent Black individuals, drawn from a complex array of historical and geographical settings and ideological traditions.[[413]](#footnote-414) The lives of Harriet Tubman, Winnie Mandela, Martin Luther King, George Padmore, Mary Seacole, Josina Machel, and Queen Mother Moore were celebrated and memorialised. Supplementary schools were eager to situate their own anti-racist work within a long and hallowed genealogy of struggle.

The George Padmore Supplementary School was founded in Finsbury Park, north London, in 1969. Historical texts dominated the school’s junior reading list, targeted at students aged seven to eleven. The list included several books offering an introduction to the biographies of notable individuals of African descent, such as Jane G. Walters’ *African Triumph*, Naomi Hutchinson’s *African Heroes,* Therese Mills’ *Great West Indians,* and Phyllis M. Cousins’ *Queen of the Mountain*.[[414]](#footnote-415) Tellingly, the latter text was the product of a collaboration between the publishing house Ginn and the Jamaican Ministry of Education.[[415]](#footnote-416) Supplementary schools often found themselves looking abroad, especially to former British colonies, for texts offering a critical standpoint on empire, during a period when few such materials were being produced for a British market. Each of the titles quoted above gave prominence to the stories of those who had resisted slavery in different settings and across multiple continents, from Olaudah Equiano and Harriet Tubman to Nanny of the Maroons. Supplementary schools vehemently rejected the idea, dominant within the British historiographical tradition, that the benevolence of the metropolitan abolitionist movement was primarily or exclusively responsible for emancipation.[[416]](#footnote-417) The composition work of a George Padmore student, dating from sometime between 1973 and 1978, took ‘The Emancipation of the British Slaves’ as its title. The student argued that abolition was motivated not by ‘humanitarian factor[s] (because the Europeans didn't care)’ but by successful revolts led by enslaved people in the Americas, alongside cold economic rationalism.[[417]](#footnote-418) The implication was clear – freedom could originate only in the struggle of Black people against their own oppression. The essay was well received by its marker.

The George Padmore book list also featured Vic Read’s *The Young Warriors,* a novel describing the initiation of young men into the Maroons’ fight against the depredations of British ‘Redshirt’ soldiers.[[418]](#footnote-419) Read’s novel represented young people as active participants in anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggle, both as fighters and as historians. The narrative placed great emphasis on the importance of popular historical understanding in maintaining a community’s sense of self and its capacity to resist outside incursions; the ability to recount the story of the origins of the Maroons was depicted as the first test of children’s readiness to become ‘young warriors’.[[419]](#footnote-420) This approach cut to the heart of the ethos of the supplementary school system, which offered Black children the opportunity to recognise and claim their own agency – and their identity as Black political subjects – by continuing the legacy of resistance left by previous generations.

Waters links the historical sensibility of the BEM to its development of a ‘black writing culture’.[[420]](#footnote-421) Students in supplementary schools and adjacent educational projects were encouraged to narrate their own experiences of race and racism, while situating themselves within a radical tradition of Black rebellion. Under these conditions, Waters argues that ‘the act of writing was a process of coming into history’. Writers were positioned, like the young Maroons, as both historians and historical agents in their own right; to marshal the past was to achieve understanding of one’s current condition, and to gain the power to inscribe oneself on the present and future. The journal produced by Ahfiwe, a London-based supplementary school, is a prime example of this process. As Waters notes, the school’s founder Ansel Wong published the writings of his students with minimal editorial intervention.[[421]](#footnote-422) Young people were given the freedom to express a deeply personal Black subjectivity. Their contributions were diverse in both form and content. A typical collection of work might include poems about the experience of Black womanhood in contemporary Britain, a young person’s intimate relationships, and a short essay on unemployment.[[422]](#footnote-423)

Some students chose to identify their own experiences of racism as products of the economic and ideological system of slavery. Janet Morris’ short poem *Black* deployed abrupt shifts in tense to move rapidly between the racism of past and present:

Black is a black man

From slavery born.

Black is a black man whose hands have been torn

From the words of a white man

Our blood has been spread

Because of a white man our brothers are dead.[[423]](#footnote-424)

Another young woman, Evelyn G. Christie, explored her personal journey towards Black consciousness. Her regret over her expulsion from school, aged 16, had driven Christie to reengage in education. She sought to establish a new sense of self on different foundations – at first by seeking out a ‘black documentary on T.V.’ and taking extensive notes.[[424]](#footnote-425) Christie commented that, having been born in England, such paltry offerings seemed her surest route to cultural knowledge. She had subsequently joined the Black Studies class at Ahfiwe both for her own sake, and to ‘learn more to pass on to others’ – especially young Black women. Christie’s story is a testament to the importance of supplementary education for British-born Black young people, who experienced feelings of severance and alienation from their own histories; by offering ‘Black Studies’ courses, supplementary schools could strengthen an individual’s cultural identity *and* supply them with a sense of affective solidarity with their peers. By narrating this development, students like Christie were in a sense reinscribing and affirming it – consolidating their new, Black subjectivity. Christie’s claim that ‘a black girl have to think about life and not just having babies and boyfriends’ might be read as a comment on the writing process, as well as her wider experience with supplementary education.

Queen Mother Moore, a Clapham-based supplementary school, encouraged its students to explore the legacies of the past as an anchor of Black selfhood. The school drew on the work of Walter Rodney to initiate regular ‘groundings sessions’ for parents, students, and staff.[[425]](#footnote-426) Rodney used the term groundings to refer to intellectual work performed in and with communities battling their own oppression, as opposed to work produced and constrained by the boundaries of the academy.[[426]](#footnote-427) As Kevin Okoth puts it, grounding required intellectuals to ‘break out of academic isolation and engage in the mutual exchange of knowledge with those struggling on the ground’.[[427]](#footnote-428) The historical understanding of the oppressed was deemed to offer particularly powerful liberatory potential. Okoth argues that the deep Rastafarian knowledge of African history, of which Rodney became a student through his groundings, offered an important ‘counterforce’ to the historical myths about the continent prevalent in academia. Rodney sought to mobilise this knowledge in the pursuit of psychological freedom and revolutionary social change.

In accordance with this tradition, Queen Mother Moore’s groundings sessions were intended to provide a historical foundation to the construction of Black selfhood, and to marshal the confidence and self-assurance of participants to build political alternatives:

Groundings sessions are crucial because our students need to know who they are, and they cannot know who they are unless they know where they come from and, as someone put it “The shortest way to the future is always one that involves a deep understanding of the past”. Knowing their history is one of the surest ways of restoring confidence in our students and gives them a positive outlook for their future.[[428]](#footnote-429)

Groundings were usually open ended and subject to the will and interests of participants. In these discussions, Black ‘contributions to world history’ were linked to ‘current issues’.[[429]](#footnote-430) The school might therefore be seen as offering students the opportunity to participate creatively in an oral historical tradition. Once again, these young people were expected to fulfil two intertwined roles, as vessels for historical knowledge and as agents of historical change.

**Afro-Caribbean Education Resource Project (ACER)**

The practice of historical self-narrativisation was not exclusive to supplementary schooling. The London-based Afro-Caribbean Education Resource Project (ACER) emerged in 1976, under the leadership of Len Garrison. The Project challenged assimilationist modes of teaching in the state education system. It encouraged teachers to offer positive affirmation of ‘racial, ethnic and cultural differences’ through a broad and representative school curriculum.[[430]](#footnote-431) Perhaps more importantly, ACER valorised the experiences of Black young people by running the annual Black Penmanship Award (later known as the Black Young Writers Competition) and publishing a selection of the best entries. An editor’s note in *Black Voices,* the anthology which collated winning essays and creative writing from the 1979-1984 competitions, presented the writing process in the following terms:

Having recognised and accepted the challenge that being Black in Britain offers them, these young people are forcefully making their presence felt in this society, and are resisting all attempts to contain the dynamism, vivacity and talent which is theirs to offer. *They are* *reclaiming their own Black history by placing themselves within the framework of the historic struggles of Black peoples, and, rightly, see themselves in the vanguard of that struggle* [emphasis added].[[431]](#footnote-432)

In terms familiar from the supplementary school movement, ACER represented Black penmanship as an entry into history precipitated by an arrival into a distinctively Black historical consciousness. The act of defining ‘themselves and their history and their culture’ was, for Black young people, an act of survival in the ‘mother country of racism’.[[432]](#footnote-433) The volume’s very publication – not to mention the contents therein – was a means of defying Black people’s ‘enforced [historical] invisibility’.[[433]](#footnote-434)

Farida Leander, a teenager at the time of *Black Voices’* publication, noted that the example set by figures such as Malcolm X and Mary Seacole could inspire young people to make their own mark on history. In Leander’s eyes, Blackness was tied to a person’s understanding of their own history, in defiance of the ‘beliefs and stereotypes’ forced upon them by White society.[[434]](#footnote-435) Similarly, for Sharon Ellis, aged 20, the preservation and articulation of historical knowledge – in the face of British destruction of the material culture of the colonised – was an immense gesture of anti-imperialist resistance, carried across multiple generations.[[435]](#footnote-436) Yet again, the historian was represented as a significant historical agent in their own right. This claim, so vital to the BEM, might be seen to have gained its ultimate expression in the words of 19-year-old Derek Jones, who described prominent leaders of the civil rights movement as ‘Black historians’.[[436]](#footnote-437)

The politics of Black history were influenced by the Jamaican faith of Rastafari. The fame of Rasta musician Bob Marley brought large numbers into contact with the religion from the beginning of the 1970s. Marley had close contact with younger members of London’s Black community during his 1972 UK tour, famously playing a spontaneous set over lunch break at Peckham Manor School in the south of the city.[[437]](#footnote-438) Garrison, ACER’s director, posited that the embrace of Rasta formed part of a ‘reaction against assimilation’ on the part of Black youth.[[438]](#footnote-439) Rastafari offered an opportunity for Black students to express their cultural specificity and pride, in the face of a system which denied or devalued their experiences. It encouraged young people to lay claim to their Blackness in a process described as the ‘freeing of a people’s personality’.[[439]](#footnote-440) The struggle for psychological freedom was framed as a battle against ‘neo-colonialism’ – defined, in this instance, as the internalisation of the White supremacist logics of empire and slavery. Rastas mobilised a distinctive historical sensibility in pursuit of this goal. The movement stressed historical continuity in defiance of the displacement and fragmentation wrought by slavery. It also contested the historiographical assumption, infamously expressed by Hugh Trevor-Roper, that African history began only with the arrival of Europeans.[[440]](#footnote-441) As Garrison put it, Rastas sought to ‘reaffirm their place as true Africans despite four centuries [in exile] under an assumed identity’.[[441]](#footnote-442)

Leander was in step with this tradition when she argued that ‘what […] makes a Black person Black is understanding and loving our culture which, contrary to popular beliefs and stereotypes, is a fine one that goes back many thousands of years’.[[442]](#footnote-443) The theme of rootedness in an enduring African heritage, so prevalent in *Black Voices*, also reflects the massive cultural impact of Alex Haley’s novel, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family,* and its televised serialisation (1976 and 1977, respectively). J. Ellis, aged 23, framed their essay as an explicit response to Haley’s work. Ellis complained of the bastardisation of the concept of ‘roots’ in the years immediately following the popular adaptation. They claimed that ‘the whole world is [suddenly] searching for their roots’, and that a ‘new industry’ had sprung up to cater for the phenomenon, referring to the ‘genealogy boom’ which followed the series’ release.[[443]](#footnote-444) Ellis sought to rescue the concept of ‘roots’ from the flattening effect of over-familiarisation, arguing that for Black people especially, it must be ‘guarded jealously and fully understood’.

The concepts of roots and rootedness were translated to the cultural specificity of the British context. The assertion of ownership over a Black Britishness with deep historical roots entered into some young people’s writing. This is particularly noticeable in Leonard (Levi Tafari) Kelly’s response to the prompt ‘Black Roots in Babylon’, which included the following passage:

Now the roots of Black culture is here

So Babylonians you better take care

Cause we help build up your land and now we want our share.

So give us our African atmosphere […]

A cultural education for all Black youths

Not a selfish education to make them brutes [[444]](#footnote-445)

For Kelly, Blackness and Britishness were irreversibly entwined by the forces of slavery and colonisation. The coerced labour of Black people was the foundation of modern British wealth. Black people therefore had a unique claim to live a rich and dignified life in ‘Babylon’ – on their own terms, and in defiance of any attempts to sever them from a culture rooted in resistance against racist dehumanisation.

The use of history to claim a Black, British identity was not universal. Indeed, some young people envisaged their ownership of a richly historicised Blackness as a disavowal of the influence of White Britishness/Englishness and its supposedly barren historical sensibility. Blackness and Britishness were occasionally portrayed as mutually hostile but mutually influential – each defined in opposition to the other. Sharon Ellis identified a commonplace sense of contradiction between legal nationality, represented by a British passport, and an individual’s subjective experience of national identity.[[445]](#footnote-446) She noted that contemporaries were hesitant to describe themselves as British when Britishness was an identity so heavily tied to White supremacy and to a negation of other histories and cultures. To claim the pan-African historical tradition of Marcus Garvey was, for Ellis, an answer to British demands that she be ‘shipped back to the jungle’.

There are two essays in the *Black Voices* anthology credited to Sharon Ellis, who is described in both cases as twenty years old. The text gives no indication of whether the same individual submitted multiple, well-received essays, or whether this is mere coincidence. Regardless, the two texts offer a similar perspective. The second essay characterised Black people as the rightful heirs to an ‘ancient African civilisation’.[[446]](#footnote-447) To be Black in Britain was, then, to feel the weight of an immense history, transmitted unbroken between generations: ‘all our previous instincts are still within each and every Black descendant’. Ellis’ comments were framed as a direct response to the infamous Conservative election advertisement of 1983, which carried an image of a Black man alongside the message ‘Labour says he's black. Tories say he’s British’. Her reply was simple: the Conservatives might say you’re British, ‘but we know we’re Black’.[[447]](#footnote-448) Ellis’ navigation of the terrain of national belonging occurred in dialogue with the language and ideology of party politics, yet it was by no means solely reactive. Neither a Blackness defined by the Labour Party (comprising a legally protected status) nor the British identity offered by the Conservatives (entailing a renunciation of historical and cultural specificity) were acceptable options. Blackness was a ‘consciousness’ or ‘state of mind’, proudly claimed and arrived at via an understanding of one’s present conditions, informed by knowledge of the past.

The 17-year-old C. Brown asserted that the primary benefit they derived from maintaining their culture was the knowledge that they did not belong to ‘a nation of oppressors who travel the globe exercising brute force and violence’.[[448]](#footnote-449) Here, Blackness was presented as a kind of psychological boon – the joy of living guiltlessly, as liberator rather than persecutor. Crucially, the identification of Britishness with the weight of historical guilt was believed by some young people to have been internalised by White Britons. The 30-year-old Janet Brown’s comment on this matter, although lengthy, is worth quoting in full:

Can the society which developed through such brutal abuse of other people suddenly admit the extent of the debauchery? The idea of inferiority based on colour and race will die, but slowly, because the society cannot live with its conscience. The present highly developed White British society is the fruit of the labour of our fore-parents; our present deprived and oppressed state is the fruit we inherited from their fore-parents. Yet the White British Society in its cocoon wildly exclaims, “we cannot be responsible for what happened hundreds of years ago”; but we are in this predicament precisely because of what started hundreds of years ago. If this is the case the society is not entitled to its valued heritage.[[449]](#footnote-450)

Brown argued that the enduring power of racism in Britain was linked to its deep historical foundations – both material and psychological. The wealth of modern Britain had been coercively extracted from Black people. The ideology created in order to justify the system of slavery – the total dehumanisation of Black people – remained rife. Those White Britons who admitted the crimes of the past, however, failed to connect them to the present; to do so would be to challenge their own comfortable position in society and their own complicity in the legacy of empire and slavery. It was easier for most to refuse to leave the ‘cocoon’ and wilfully misinterpret history than to challenge the foundations of their own privilege, sacrificing the psychological comfort of ignorance for the perceived burden of a guilty conscience.

This analysis is especially pertinent to the specific conditions of the 1980s, when a concept of pastness served as an important prop for White, British identity. As Robert Hewison has claimed, a profound sense of national decline – associated with the end of empire, the collapse of British industry, and the attendant loss of international economic dominance – dominated popular culture.[[450]](#footnote-451) In this context, representations of an idealised past functioned as a form of escapism. British people became both manufacturers of, and a market for, what Hewison termed the ‘heritage industry’. The brutality of imperial history could have no place in a cultural phenomenon calculated above all to evoke feelings of pride and comfort. Empire would either have to be celebrated as an integral part of the national heritage or excluded from the ‘past made present’ – confined to a distant recess of history which could have no bearing on contemporary realities.[[451]](#footnote-452) When Brown lacerated White society’s entitlement to ‘its valued heritage’, it was this erasure to which she referred.

Writing in 1987, Hewison suggested that the use of heritage to ameliorate the climate of national decline was ultimately in vain, and indeed risked compounding feelings of desperation. If a society orientated itself towards the past, then it conceded that the present and future were of a predetermined, inferior nature. The inevitable result was a loss of all ‘capacity for creative change’.[[452]](#footnote-453) Likewise, the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard has posited that a mass fixation on the conservation of symbols of a cherished past militated against history-making in the present.[[453]](#footnote-454) By contrast, the BEM’s emphasis on the recovery and restitution of an African cultural inheritance was self-consciously futuristic. The preservation of Black history was itself an act of rebellion. Those who sought meaning in the past typically understood it as a repository of examples with the power to inspire and mould contemporary resistance, and to build a better world.

The BEM challenged dominant approaches to history and to heritage. In contrast to the academic position of the historian as a neutral external observer, the BEM understood the historian as a fundamentally subjective role: history was a tool of Black consciousness-building which was to be mobilised for and within Black movements. History was neither a march towards progress nor a narrative fundamentally concerned with the dispossession and oppression of Black people. Rather, the power of Black resistance was its major theme. To quote Paul Gilroy, writing in a different context, the ceaseless reconstruction of history was nothing less than a celebration of the ‘simple, unassailable fact’ of Black survival.[[454]](#footnote-455) With reference to the Rasta movement, Garrison described how young people’s sense of rootedness in a rich historical tradition had ‘challenged the stereotype of the black person as held by white society, and indeed held by blacks themselves’.[[455]](#footnote-456) ‘More importantly’, he suggested, ‘it has been challenging the education system, because the black child is taking on a new level of self-awareness’; Black pupils no longer felt apologetic about their Blackness, nor did they feel personally responsible for their perceived failure to achieve within a racist system. Certainly, it seems that many felt empowered to publicly criticise the education they were receiving. As a result of the contemporary interest in the practice of children’s self-narrativisation, their words have been recorded and offer an unusually rich, unmediated insight into young people’s own experiences within the classroom.

**Talking Chalk: Reconstructing the Classroom Experiences of Young People of Colour**

In 1982, the Birmingham-based anti-racist campaigning group All Faiths for One Race (AFFOR) published a collection of interviews describing the experience of young people of colour within the education system. The pamphlet, entitled *Talking Chalk*, gave equal weight to the voices of ‘black pupils, parents and teachers’.[[456]](#footnote-457) The organisation was guided by the concept of political blackness. Owing to resource constraints, AFFORincluded almost every interview it taped. Interviewees were not prompted, and their words appeared virtually unedited in the final publication. As in *Black Voices*, history was a dominant theme.

In both texts, the vast majority of subject-specific complaints pertained to history. History’s perceived importance in the construction of identities – Black, politically black, and White – was one reason why its teaching was so hotly contested. *Black Voices* reveals that some young people understood their learning within the BEM as a counterweight to the pernicious narratives they received in mainstream historical education. For the recent school-leaver Jacqueline Deacon, the goal of Black self-education was to make visible the ways in which Black history had been ‘changed’ or ‘eradicated’ by White historians.[[457]](#footnote-458) To discover the historical truth of Black achievement would be to throw off the ‘inferiority complex’ she had received in the school classroom. Like Coard, Deacon reversed the ‘deficit thesis’ which had hitherto informed educational policies directed at young people of colour.

Deacon divided history syllabi into two categories: those which erased Black history, and those which misrepresented it.[[458]](#footnote-459) A recent school leaver interviewed by AFFOR claimed that there had been no formal teaching of Black history over the course of their school career. The world outside of Europe was presented as a lifeless map which White people roamed and conquered: ‘before white people went to Africa’, teaching seemed to imply, ‘black people had no history’.[[459]](#footnote-460) The speaker was conscious of the effect of such narratives upon the self-esteem of Black students. By refusing to present historical examples of Black achievement – the speaker cited the examples of African pioneers in maritime technology and mathematics – the English education system left young people unable to recognise ingenuity and powers of history-making in themselves. As in the BEM, we can recognise a futuristic orientation in these comments. Black young people viewed history as a site of possibility, to be recruited to their own ends. The classic temporal division between past, present, and future, was similarly eroded by young people’s personal sense of historicity and historical importance. This was neatly expressed by an interviewee who cited the professional successes of their peers as a source of inspiration for the ‘younger kids’, who would be more likely to believe they could achieve if they understood that ‘black people have already made the way’.[[460]](#footnote-461)

Young people who did not study Black history in school sometimes reported feeling a sense of alienation or struggles with identity. Here again, the concept of roots and rootedness was important. One speaker in the AFFOR collection asserted that they ‘didn’t know anything about going back to my roots, until I was about 15 or 16’.[[461]](#footnote-462) At this point, information which they felt to have been previously suppressed came to light – they found out that they were ‘descended from a slave’. The speaker detailed the painful shock which resulted from this revelation, which suddenly gave new meaning to their presence in Britain. Another voice in *Talking Chalk* spoke to the fraught relationship with Britain and Britishness which they felt resulted from silences in the history curriculum. The interviewee, who was born in Britain and of Jamaican heritage, had attended a school in which Black history was not taught. The false divide erected between Black and British history left them grappling with questions ‘about my true identity’, as if a side needed to be chosen.

When a school’s curriculum did include topics drawn from Black history, complaints typically concerned the perspective from which this history was told. One parent featured in *Talking Chalk* accused the education system of perpetrating harm by failing to address itself to ‘black history – and black history not as seen through the eyes of whites, but as seen through the eyes of blacks’.[[462]](#footnote-463) In *Black Voices,* 17-year-old Susan Rigg observed that her school’s history textbooks carried a highly selective account of the past. Black history was stripped down to a ‘negative and hopeless image’.[[463]](#footnote-464) Several AFFOR interviewees commented on the primacy given to slavery in accounts of Black history given in schools. A teacher who decided to investigate Black history resources in her school’s library was alarmed to discover that slavery was the only topic represented. These texts focused on White abolitionism, as embodied in the heroic actions of individuals, to the exclusion of Black agency and collective resistance.[[464]](#footnote-465) The headteacher of the school in question met protests with the assimilationist claim that English schools should valorise English history (‘when you’re in England you do as the English do’). Rigg noted that such narratives had a deleterious effect – both on the confidence of Black young people and on the prospects for racial justice in modern Britain. ‘Through all these sources’, she argued, ‘one is subconsciously being informed of the Black person's position or “should be” condition in society’.[[465]](#footnote-466) Schools presented White domination as normative. The historical portrayal of Black people as devoid of critical thought and independent agency reverberated in the present, when Black children felt themselves ‘labelled as inferior’.[[466]](#footnote-467)

Young people of South Asian heritage often described similar experiences. Some of those interviewed by AFFORcomplained of their erasure from school curricula.[[467]](#footnote-468) Others noted that ‘history classes still teach how the British ruled the “colonies” as a favour to the supposedly backward, uncivilised people in Africa and India’.[[468]](#footnote-469) Students of South Asian heritage felt that history was narrated selectively: British atrocities were excised in order to construct a story of benevolent paternalism. These pupils posited unfree labour and forced migration as the building blocks of the British nation-state, in sharp contrast to the widespread portrayal of slavery as a short period of exceptional brutality brought to a swift end by White abolitionists. These students, like their Black counterparts, connected school histories to questions of identity and self-esteem. If Asian pupils’ sense of self was damaged by the content of school teaching, it was only logical that White pride would be bolstered. Interviewees suggested that White students’ racism was reinforced by the study of histories which reaffirmed their perception of civilisational superiority.[[469]](#footnote-470)

The BEM gave many Black students the knowledge and confidence required to contest the narratives presented by school history. Other pupils drew their power from more informal educational structures. *Talking Chalk* quoted a student who had responded to racist erasure by seeking out knowledge ‘on the street in this community, and from friends and family’.[[470]](#footnote-471) ‘Mr D’, a parent interviewed by AFFOR, expressed pride in his own role as educator. ‘Most thinking black parents’, he suggested, offered their children ‘the right information’ to develop some form of self-knowledge and self-confidence.[[471]](#footnote-472) The Central Manchester Caribbean English Project facilitated two ‘Support Groups’ which offered young Black people the opportunity to ‘describe and reason out their experiences together’. Conversations recorded during these groups later formed the basis for a publication, *Triangular Minds: Black Youth on Identity. Triangular Minds* juxtaposed ‘schooling’ – an institutional process of knowledge transmission which occurred without reference to family or community – to ‘education’, which was the learning accrued from ‘parents, friends, elders, people they admired and people in their communities’. [[472]](#footnote-473) History was an intrinsic part of this education. Group values were perceived as subject to intergenerational transmission: a moral-cultural heritage was passed down, learned, and re-learned via dialogue and the power of example.

The parents and/or grandparents of the first generation of people of colour to pass through the English education system often had direct experience of colonial rule. Several of the young people involved in *Triangular Minds* described their parents’ refusal to speak of personal histories of racial discrimination, motivated by embarrassment or by a desire to leave painful memories in the past.[[473]](#footnote-474) Many viewed their parents’ silence as the loss of a reference point for their own experiences of racial discrimination. Nevertheless, in some families cross-generational conversation facilitated the sharing of memories. Thus, the legacies of the imperial past impinged on the present. Marc Ferro has described the classroom as a site of confrontation between ‘collective memory and official history’.[[474]](#footnote-475) Writing in 1981, Ferro cited the example of schools in the Polish People's Republic, which offered a historical narrative of Russian liberation which differed substantially from ‘the history told at home’. Kitchen-table histories of the British empire, which stood in contrast or contradiction to the accounts presented at school, inflected students’ classroom experiences.

This process has been mapped out in autobiographical writing. Rabina Khan, educated in Kent in the 1970s, has described the educational role of her paternal grandfather, who had experienced life under the British Raj. Khan credited her grandfather with teaching her about Britain’s extraction of wealth from the Indian subcontinent and its culpability in the hasty, violent bordering of Partition.[[475]](#footnote-476) Khan, who is of Bangladeshi heritage, was once asked to give a presentation to her class on Gandhi – usually considered an Indian political leader. As Khan herself emphasised, this had the dual effect of eliding and flattening the complex web of South Asian national identities and cultures, and of placing the burden of representation exclusively on her shoulders. When the time came to deliver the presentation, Khan ‘added a personal note’, describing her grandfather’s experiences and tracing the impact of British rule upon the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. For Khan, as for some within the BEM, history was a living process rather than an abstract subject of study, siloed within and irretrievable from a distant past. Empire maintained a recognisable grip on her world. Crucially, her (otherwise entirely White) class was introduced to this perspective via Khan’s intervention. Whether they took her words onboard is, of course, another matter (Khan’s own account suggests a mixed response).

Khan presented her school as an institution in which old maps showing the British empire at its zenith co-existed with well-intentioned but misguided attempts to draw on the essentialised cultural knowledge of a small minority of non-White students.[[476]](#footnote-477) By temporarily positioning Khan as teacher, her teachers opened a space in which both narratives could be contested – with an ironic stamp of legitimacy. In other schools, such contributions were less welcome, but perhaps no less present. Derek Jones, quoted above, described the fury provoked by his first experience ‘[questioning] the text which we were being taught from’.[[477]](#footnote-478) In Jones’ final year at school, the history curriculum covered slavery. Its focus was ‘slave masters and their plantations’, to the exclusion of Black agency. In response to this material, Jones sought to bring the teacher’s attention to the long history of Black anti-racist resistance, citing the example of Martin Luther King. His intervention can be seen as a mode of education in and of itself.

Much like Khan, Jones offered White students an insight into Black historical agency which they would otherwise have been denied. His account demonstrates that pupils who took on the role of educators often experienced significant distress and acted through a feeling of compulsion. Jones was presented with a choice: witness the uncontested objectification of Black people, or challenge the teacher and suffer the consequences. The teacher in question responded with a mocking rejection of Black people’s role as history-makers and excluded him from the remainder of the lesson.[[478]](#footnote-479)

Anwar Qadir, an interviewee in the Second Generation Asians Resisting Racism Project, conducted in 2007, recalled a similar experience in which kitchen-table histories brought him into conflict with a teacher. Upon hearing of the content of a recent school history lesson, Qadir’s father set out to correct the information and reframe the narrative which his son had received – ‘not because he was that educated in historical facts of India’, but from his own experiences.[[479]](#footnote-480) According to Qadir’s account:

I was taught in my history lesson how good the Empire was for India, and ‘we built the roads for the uncivilised people out there’ etc. When I came and shared that with my father, my father says, ‘well most of the roads were already there’, right, ‘some roads were built by the Raj, but they weren’t built for the benefit of the Indians, they were built so that they could get the stuff out of India a lot quicker’, right, ‘and more conveniently’, and as far as civilisation is concerned, you know, we were running around in silks when this lot was still in animal skins! So, I went back and shared that information with my school history teacher. I wasn’t very popular with the teacher after that.[[480]](#footnote-481)

Jones and Qadir prove that a hostile teaching staff was not sufficient to prevent anti-colonial histories from entering the classroom. Nevertheless, pupils who took on the role of educating their peers in such environments did so at significant personal cost.

**Theorising Multicultural History**

As we have seen, the initial response of the British education system to the presence of ‘immigrant’ children was governed by the ‘deficit’ thesis, which posited such pupils as a problem to be managed by the state. This logic yielded ‘compensatory education’, which aimed to correct the deficiencies supposedly bequeathed to students by their home environment.[[481]](#footnote-482) Perhaps the most common form of compensatory education, especially in its early stages, was the teaching of English as a foreign language. After 1966, tuition was usually enabled by ‘Section 11’ funding – a reference to Section 11 of the Local Government Act, under which local authorities could apply for government grants to cover ‘expenditure due to immigrant population’.[[482]](#footnote-483) The ‘special provision’ mandated by Section 11 represented the first form of what would come to be known alternately as multicultural, multiethnic, or multiracial education (for ease of understanding, ‘multicultural education’ will be preferred below, except in cases of direct quotation from a source using another term). In its most basic sense, multiculturalism was a pedagogical approach which acknowledged, incorporated, or valorised the specific requirements of groups variously defined as ethnic, racial, or cultural, but amongst whom culture tended to be viewed as the major, unifying characteristic.[[483]](#footnote-484)

Multicultural education was continually reformulated. In some schools, a shift away from the compensatory model was prompted by fears of youth rebellion. The translation of Black Studies courses into a mainstream, state educational offering can be linked to this anxiety. The genesis of Black Studies was the British Black Power movement, which followed its American antecedent in calling for education to promote pride in Blackness.[[484]](#footnote-485) As in supplementary schools, mainstream teachers genuinely hoped to bolster the educational attainment of downwardly racialised students by challenging ‘negative self-image’.[[485]](#footnote-486) However, Dhondy ascribed a more cynical, subtly disciplinary function to the translation of Black Studies to a state educational setting. A curriculum which affirmed rather than undermined the identities of young people of colour had the capacity to curb alienation; if students were to experience validation and self-recognition within mainstream education, they were less likely to seek it elsewhere [[486]](#footnote-487). Thus, Black Studies might offer an opportunity to defang youth movements like the Rastafari. Contemporaries noted the use of Black Studies to pacify and control ‘non-examinable’ Black pupils, ‘while white pupils got on with their ‘O’ levels and CSEs’.[[487]](#footnote-488) As Carter has argued, racially minoritised pupils risked being prescribed ‘“self” histories’ as an ‘easy’ option in examination forms.[[488]](#footnote-489)

Encouraged by the campaigning work of Teachers Against Racism (TAR), the London Borough of Lambeth piloted Black Studies in the Sixth Forms of multiple secondary schools as part of an effort to prevent crimes associated with truancy.[[489]](#footnote-490) Black Studies, in this setting, certainly tried to exercise control over rebellious youth. Similarly, it seems no coincidence that the two clearest governmental endorsements of educational multiculturalism – the Rampton Report (1981) and the Swann Report (1985) – were both issued in the aftermath of the 1981 riots, often viewed as a form of youth rebellion against state racism.[[490]](#footnote-491) The Rampton Committee was created by the Labour government prior to their dramatic loss in the 1979 election. The incoming Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, was initially eager to terminate its work. Sally Tomlinson, herself intimately involved in contemporary movements for educational justice, wrote that it was a combination of the pressure of ‘riots and reports’ which preserved the committee, now under the leadership of the Liberal Lord Swann.[[491]](#footnote-492)

As history was important to the feared youth movements, so too was it prioritised in multicultural curricula. One parent, pained by – yet understanding of – their child’s educational disengagement, argued that ‘factions like Rastafarians’ gained power from a situation in which young people were desperately ‘trying to identify with something they can call their own’.[[492]](#footnote-493) If history classrooms could be transformed into a site in which Black identities were valorised, then Rastafari would ‘lose out’. The parent in question certainly wasn’t interested in the radical Blackness constructed by the BEM’s engagement with Black history. If Black history was to be integrated into mainstream education, as an aid to Black students’ peaceful integration and inclusion within that system, the object of study could not be constitutive of a political identity which sought alternatives outside the system. South Asian parents sometimes articulated a similar reasoning. An AFFOR interviewee claimed that ‘there are quite a few subjects on the school curriculum at the moment where we as Asians do not get a look in, but where we could quite easily do so *without causing any kind of upsetting the system* [emphasis added]’, citing the example of History.[[493]](#footnote-494) Plural histories were here valued as an ameliorative concession designed to curb more radical political possibilities; the intention was to preserve the *status quo* as far as possible, by achieving consent from racially minoritised youth.

Black Studies courses were immediately controversial. Critics argued that the message of Black Studies would be devalued and undercut if the remainder of the school curriculum was left unchanged. Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe observed the irony of teaching Black Studies alongside geography lessons ‘which depicted the “developing” Third World as being totally dependent upon western generosity’, and history classes ‘which concentrated on glorious white conquest’.[[494]](#footnote-495) Criticism also focused on the paucity of provision for White pupils, whose racist assumptions were left unchallenged by educational interventions targeting the specific needs of students of colour. Teachers were increasingly concerned with youth racism and the resurgence of British fascism – embodied in the growing power of the National Front.[[495]](#footnote-496) Rampton noted the experience of a London secondary school which had instituted a Black Studies curriculum, only to find that racial tensions were heightened; White pupils, along with ‘many of the staff’, resented and reacted against the ‘special treatment’ of West Indian students.[[496]](#footnote-497)

In the place of separate Black Studies courses, Rampton expressed support for a multicultural approach which encompassed the totality of the curriculum. In this iteration, multiculturalism was linked to a concept of good citizenship and the crafting of a governable civil society, in what was sometimes perceived as a ‘retooling of old race relations models’ which envisaged racism as an essentially interpersonal affair.[[497]](#footnote-498) It promoted peaceful coexistence within and between diverse communities by incorporating them all within a broad, ostensibly deracialised, concept of English/British nationhood; multicultural education was as important in predominantly White areas as it was in those with a high proportion of people of colour.[[498]](#footnote-499)

This argument was founded on a belief that ignorance was the root cause of prejudice amongst young people. Much like the supporters of world history, governmental advocates of multicultural education argued that the changing relationship between the UK and the wider world necessitated a shift in the content of teaching if students were to leave school equipped to understand that reality. Unlike most proponents of world history, multiculturalists also turned their gaze inwards. They acknowledged that the UK’s shifting position on the world-stage had engendered major changes in the fabric of quotidian life – including the reality of mass migration – and sought to represent these changes in the school curriculum. The realities of internalmigration were also recognised: children brought up in predominantly White areas could not be expected to remain there forever. Nor would teachers trained in mainly White areas or institutions be guaranteed employment there. To ignore these shifts would be to pave the way to future conflict and misunderstanding.[[499]](#footnote-500)

The teaching of history was seen as fundamental to this pedagogy of empathy. A paper produced by the Extramural Division of SOAS claimed that history had the power to make the distant familiar and showcased the importance of understanding other cultures on their own terms. Thus, ‘Susan living in London will no longer regard medieval pilgrims or African chiefs as “funny” just because they lived, dressed and earned their living in totally different ways from her’.[[500]](#footnote-501) The same document expressed faith that the *practice* of history – the critical evaluation of sources, the weighing of evidence, and the importance of perspective – would inoculate students against the appeal of fascist ideology. Multicultural reformers’ preoccupation with the historical method might be linked to the wider shift towards skills-based learning, as discussed in Chapter 2. Advocates of the ‘new history’ alleged that a ‘tidy factual approach’ which reduced history to the crude memorisation of a ‘shopping-list’ left students bereft of analytical capacities.[[501]](#footnote-502) Multiculturalism argued that the traditional approach not only produced defective historians, but deficient citizens.

Carter has affirmed the importance of ‘pupils, teachers, and educationists’ in crafting the discipline of history in schools, often independently of, or in contradistinction to, developments in academic history.[[502]](#footnote-503) Multiculturalism was one product of this demotic historical tradition – and was recognised as such by contemporaries. A 1982 Discussion Paper published by the HA credited the multicultural turn to ‘educationists, special interest groups and bureaucrats’ in place of ‘professional historians’.[[503]](#footnote-504) The initial drive for curricular change occurred at a local level, in individual schools and classrooms (principally those in which students of colour were most heavily represented).[[504]](#footnote-505) In a reversal of conventional classroom hierarchies, teachers sometimes portrayed students of colour as their own educators. The racism experienced by young people – made visible in classroom conversations and the discriminatory functions of the education system itself – provoked revisions to accepted notions of history and national identity. Educators struggled to reconcile ‘the colour bar and the Nottingham and Notting Hill race riots’ with ‘the Whig interpretation of history, where Britain was the land of an ever-extending freedom and tolerance’.[[505]](#footnote-506) Douglas Thorburn, a history teacher at a Lewisham secondary school, credited ‘a relatively small group of children of post-war settlers’ with crystallising a challenge to the cultural assumptions which had long ‘forged the Imperial school of history teaching’.[[506]](#footnote-507)

Pressure from below led to a gradual endorsement of multicultural education by state institutions, including LEAs, the Schools Council, DES, and the Home Affairs Committee. However, government interventions could meet with considerable backlash from teachers who felt patronised or insulted that their best-judgement and professional prerogatives were being infringed upon by outsiders. This was especially pertinent where racism was brought into the conversation. Rampton observed that the mere ‘suggestion that teachers are in any way racist’ aroused ‘very strong reactions’ from the profession and was often simply rejected out of hand.[[507]](#footnote-508) The Schools Council, responsible for the administration of school examinations in England and Wales and hence intimately involved in curriculum design, reported an overwhelmingly negative response to its lectures on multicultural education, delivered to an audience of teachers.[[508]](#footnote-509) Speakers – largely drawn from academic or policy-making backgrounds – were criticised for their lack of direct classroom experience. Some teachers seem to have felt patronised by recommendations given by outsiders, and by the lack of credit given to their own intelligence and good-will towards students. A lecture which took the position that ‘Asian children were insufficiently catered for’ by current teaching practices provoked an especially strong, defensive reaction. One attendee complained that the speaker left a ‘huge number of *very* disgusted teachers [emphasis in original]’ in his wake. The prevailing mood was one of affronted injustice at being told that ‘few of us [teachers] did our job properly’.

**Criticisms of Existing Practice**

Multicultural education was formulated in opposition to existing practice. As Chapter 2 made clear, schools struggled with the financial demands of replacing textbooks; it was not unusual for classes in the early 1970s to be using texts published in the 1930s.[[509]](#footnote-510) The humanities frequently found themselves at the bottom of the priority list when it came to funding allocations, owing to a popular belief that – unlike the sciences or maths – ‘history doesn't change’.[[510]](#footnote-511) History was a rigid, immutable narrative to be passed down from generation to generation. Economies of scale further also affected the content of history textbooks. The cheapest sets of books were usually those which had been reprinted multiple times, usually with minimal editorial revision. In a very literal sense, then, the ‘myths of the past’ continued to ‘damage […] the present’.[[511]](#footnote-512)

Sometimes, the problem was one of simple factual inaccuracies which appeared to pause history at the moment of first publication. Textbooks which had been published prior to the political independence of Britain’s former colonies remained in widespread circulation. Such texts painted an image of a world in which Britain retained political primacy, and in which the colonised held minimal political agency; they were at once inaccurate and inadvertently nostalgic. The feedback loop they created may have reinforced the carelessness with which authors of more modern textbooks labelled the world outside Europe. For example, P.W.R. Foot’s *The Child in the Twentieth Century*, published in 1968, used Tanzania’s colonial designation (Tanganyika). At this time, Tanzania had been independent for a full four years.[[512]](#footnote-513) In other cases, the problem was more explicitly narrative. Proctor mourned the ‘sad fact’ that many of the books he cited were only recently written.[[513]](#footnote-514) Or, as Dorothy Kuya put it, ‘many schoolbooks written in the seventies appear to be more colourful versions of books written in the forties, with no change of approach in the handling of subjects, or the ideas within them. Colonial poses are struck; the white man is still in charge’.[[514]](#footnote-515)

World history texts, though self-consciously positioned as innovative, were not exempt. Critics argued that the *way* histories of the non-European world were presented in the classroom was ‘more important than the actual amount’.[[515]](#footnote-516) Accusations of ‘Eurocentricity’ and ‘cultural imperialism’ abounded.[[516]](#footnote-517) David Killingray, a teacher, teacher-trainer, and a historian of empire, felt compelled to inform fellow educators that it was preferable to traverse ‘the well-ploughed fields of Tudor England’ than to indulge in a misdirected ‘wandering over the grasslands of central Africa’.[[517]](#footnote-518) Others stressed the dangers of exoticism: to offer a ‘Cook’s tour’ of the world would merely serve to reduce other histories and cultures to a caricatured notion of ‘difference’, while presenting them as peripheral to the main current of the past.[[518]](#footnote-519) One might recall here the contention made by Chapter 2: a picturesque account of world history, allegedly seen through the eyes of an (exoticised) Other, offered a means of escape from reflection on the impact of empire.

World history was also accused of creating a false dichotomy between the domestic and foreign, national and global. These binaries ignored the complex, mutually influential nature of the relationship between colony and metropole. Amongst the most tangible legacies of this relationship was the multiracial, multicultural character of contemporary British society.[[519]](#footnote-520) The National Association for Multi-Racial Education (NAME) noted that ‘British history has been connected with that of Africa and the Caribbean’ for at least four centuries and advocated for all children to be given the opportunity to explore such connections.[[520]](#footnote-521) In the Caribbean context, one teacher suggested that an adequate course would include ‘teaching about Ciboney, Arawak, and Carib peoples, about popular protest in the European period, and about the process by which imperial colonies eventually became free and independent states’.[[521]](#footnote-522)

By contrast, some curricula continued to present imperial and ‘world’ histories as a mere appendage of Britain’s past. The Schools Council project, *Education for a Multiracial Society: Curriculum and Context 5-13,* criticised a comprehensive secondary school’s humanities unit on Africa in exactly these terms. The bulk of the unit dealt primarily with ‘explorers’ (Vasco da Gama, David Livingstone, Mungo Park, Richard Francis Burton, and John Hanning Speke) alongside the ‘struggle for power in South Africa […] between the British, the Boers and the Zulus’.[[522]](#footnote-523) This was not an isolated case. In 1977, NAME set out to expose the ‘serious distortions and omissions’ prevalent within British textbooks on African history.[[523]](#footnote-524) A survey of 21 books revealed that the following topics dominated syllabi: ‘exploration’ and ‘discovery’; the partition of Africa (the ‘Scramble’); and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. All were treated as primarily ‘European events’, directed exclusively by White participants.

The problem was exemplified by the *Jackdaw* series. *Jackdaws,* a creation of the early 1960s, were collections of facsimile historical documents intended for classroom use. Raphael Samuel presented them as the cutting edge of historical pedagogy, offering young people a sense of personal ownership of the past which was emblematic of contemporary child-centred approaches to learning.[[524]](#footnote-525) Samuel acknowledged that the ‘choice of subject was quite conservative, as befitted a mainstream publisher’, and that the series tended to cover the traditional timeline of British political and constitutional history. Indeed, of the 100 *Jackdaw* titles available in 1982, only four were ‘devoted to specifically non-European topics’.[[525]](#footnote-526) The teacher and multicultural advocate David Edgington observed that there were other *Jackdaws* devoted to what he described as ‘Third World subjects’ but, in line with Dummett’s thesis, these were chiefly ‘preoccupied with Europeans’ involvement there: e.g. Livingstone in Africa, Clive in India, etc.’.[[526]](#footnote-527) The effect was to treat colonised peoples as objects of European policy, rather than as historical agents in their own right. Racial hierarchies in which White colonisers were positioned as the agents of civilisational development were implicitly reaffirmed.

In some cases, a discourse of colonial justification was made more explicit. Edgington astutely noted that the teleological approach to history (‘the idea of history as progress’) was inescapably bound up with notions of racial and civilisational hierarchy. In presenting a White, western European and north American way of life as the desirable end-point of history, the historical narrative placed ‘the white man on a higher level than the rest’.[[527]](#footnote-528) Edgington observed that the teleological approach had fewer advocates than it had enjoyed thirty years previously, but that ‘concepts of progress’ still lingered on in many history textbooks. Thus, the explanatory materials accompanying the *Jackdaw* pack titled *The Indian Mutiny* offered an unabashed justification for British rule in India on the basis of progress:

Today we can understand that people do not wish their countries to be colonized or parts of other people’s empires; they would rather make their own decisions, *even if the wrong ones*, than receive benefits from a foreign ruling race. It is part of human nature to resent other people’s interference, even though it is intended to be *for one’s own good* [emphasis added].[[528]](#footnote-529)

The document endorsed an understanding of British colonisation as a civilising mission which tried selflessly to guide lesser peoples towards a state of prosperity and good governance. Significantly, it also justified colonisation by constructing an insuperable divide between the intellectual worlds of past and present; colonisers were bound to a mentality viewed as fundamentally and incontrovertibly imperialistic. As previously identified, Gopal exposes this justification as a historical fiction.[[529]](#footnote-530) The result was to release White readers from the burden of guilt: imperialism was safely confined to an unreachable past, in which it was nothing less than a historical inevitability.

The same logic was at play in comparative discussions of other colonial projects. Edgington noted the defensive tone taken by textbook authors who delivered a ‘unilateral rationalization of “our” actions’.[[530]](#footnote-531) Such writers simultaneously constructed a national community, founded on shared historical memory, and enfolded their readers within it. The British national character – defined by ‘fair play’ and ‘commitment to the native people’ – was forged in a dual relationship with empire, and with other imperial powers. Teaching on nineteenth century imperial conquest in the African continent, for example, would commonly focus on the ‘cruelty of Leopold II of Belgium’. The supposed humanity and goodwill of British imperialism was constructed in opposition to Belgian depredations. Meanwhile, in representing Belgian imperialism as exceptional in its violence, writers could avoid passing judgement on the imperial system *in totum.*

The texts studied by NAME seem largely to have taken a different, though no less exculpatory, approach to the question of historical responsibility. The organisation noted that Cecil Rhodes was usually portrayed as an ‘ambitious and greedy’ character who had used ‘devious methods’ to achieve his ends.[[531]](#footnote-532) By ripping Rhodes from the wider context of British imperialism and presenting him as an abstract embodiment of evil, these texts absolved the nation-state of all guilt. Imperialism was transformed from a systematic to a personal form of violence. The ‘superficial balance’ which saw individuals like Rhodes indicted with offences against morality sat in easy concord with an account of decolonisation which excised African participation. An *inherently* violent system might have been expected to arouse resistance. Thus, to preserve a narrative we might call Rhodesian exceptionalism, independence must necessarily be presented as something granted, rather than taken.

Criticism of existing resources raised the question of what should be done with them. Teachers were advised to critically examine the texts they used for evidence of bias and the possibility of harm caused to students of colour. Organisations including ACER, NAME, and the National Union of Students (NUS) published checklists and guidelines against which teachers could evaluate resources, themselves often drawing on work previously issued by a range of international anti-racist organisations.[[532]](#footnote-533) These invited teachers to view historical writing as a subjective process guided by unequal power relations. A guide originally issued by the Birmingham-based anti-racist organisation the World Council of Churches (WCC), and later republished by ACER, asked educators to ask the following questions of their textbooks, amongst many others:

Is European development regarded as the highest stage?

Is there an explanation of historical events of the dominated group from its own point of view?

Are the customs […] presented as exotica?

Are the internal differences of former colonies cited as proof of innate inability of the peoples to govern themselves successfully?[[533]](#footnote-534)

There were calls for a national, coordinated response to the problem of harmful teaching resources. The NUS claimed to be ‘building up a list of books which act counter to the aim of creating a true multi-racial [sic.] and multiethnic society’.[[534]](#footnote-535) As far as I can tell, no trace of this list has been preserved, and it does not seem to have been cited as a useful aid by contemporary teachers. This perhaps indicates the difficulty in formulating a collective response to a problem which was so profoundly individual – operating at the level of a single school or even single classroom.

Another common response to the problem of racist history textbooks was to urge their creative recycling as primary sources. Nigel File, a notable early adopter of multicultural approaches at Tulse Hill, advised that a ‘good teaching point’ could be made from textbooks which described processes of European exploration and conquest as ‘discovery’.[[535]](#footnote-536) Such histories laid bare the complicity of the historian in the colonising process, as an agent of erasure and dehumanisation of indigenous communities. Similar approaches were taken by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and ACER, albeit with important qualifiers. Guidelines produced by the NUT advised members to use ‘out of date’ resources with ‘extreme caution’.[[536]](#footnote-537) The Union acknowledged the potential benefits of presenting tangible evidence of Britain’s colonial past to young learners, though it stressed the ‘potentially divisive effect’ on classroom dynamics. Ultimately, teachers were left to make their own judgement calls based on a sensitive understanding of interpersonal relations within their classroom. The NUT concluded by noting that some texts were ‘so abhorrent’ that they would inevitably cause offence in the multicultural classroom and must therefore be avoided in all circumstances. ACER likewise suggested that teachers and students might both benefit from the critical analysis of their textbooks – as long as teachers held the knowledge, sensitivity, and trust required to ‘openly discuss stereotypes with students’.[[537]](#footnote-538)

**Changing the Narrative: Resourcing and Teaching Multicultural History**

There was a substantial demand for new resources to replace those deemed damaging. The availability of resources with a self-consciously multicultural orientation increased rapidly from the beginning of the 1970s. Douglas Thorburn, the Lewisham secondary school teacher quoted above, reflected favourably on the resources available to those seeking to construct a Caribbean history curriculum in 1981. He noted that, just a decade prior, there had been ‘very few commercially produced resources available’.[[538]](#footnote-539) The overall effect would have been discouraging, although eager teachers had responded to the difficulties as best they could. Some had created their own materials to supplement the ‘one good textbook series’, alongside the meagre pickings of travelogue films and a ‘variety of unimpressive Eurocentric books’. By the start of the 1980s, teachers could choose from a broader range of options. The situation was no doubt helped by textbooks designed for the history courses of newly independent countries, which were frequently Anglophone (a legacy of colonisation) and increasingly available on the British market.[[539]](#footnote-540) The African-Caribbean historian Edward Brathwaite’s series, *The People Who Came*, originally intended for use in Caribbean secondary schools, was the ‘one good […] series’ to which Thorburn previously referred. The more recently available texts Thorburn recommended included Vic Reid’s *The Young Warriors* and Phyllis M. Cousins’ *Queen of the Mountain*, both of which, as we have seen, featured prominently on Supplementary School reading lists. The 1984 text *Curriculum Opportunities in a Multicultural Society* likewise advised history teachers to draw upon the materials published by ‘teachers from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean’.[[540]](#footnote-541) Nevertheless, Thorburn’s account was not entirely encouraging. He identified the ‘ILEA World History Packs’ as the most substantial resource available for the lower secondary level, which was more poorly served by new materials than the higher age groups.[[541]](#footnote-542) As argued in Chapter 2, the ILEA’s World History Curriculum Project was conceived as a trailblazer in multicultural educational practice, but would nevertheless have failed many of the tests set by the WCC and outlined above.

In 1981, a Schools Council investigation reported on recent curricular change in a multiracial comprehensive school. History represented a single unit within an ‘Integrated Humanities’ course delivered to students in their second year of secondary education. The unit focused on west African history, divided into five topics: ‘The Beginnings of Civilised Life’; ‘The “Dark Continent”’; ‘The Slave Trade’; ‘The explorers and missionaries’; and ‘The British in West Africa’.[[542]](#footnote-543) The unit was conceived as ‘an attempt to place the traditional Eurocentric elements of slavery and explorers within an African perspective’. The Schools Council were critical of the degree to which these aims were met. Teachers running the course found that they were forced to allot a ‘disproportionate amount of time’ to the third and fourth sections (‘The Slave Trade’ and ‘The explorers and missionaries’) in part due to the greater availability of material covering those topics. The teachers seem to have attributed the enduring Eurocentrism of their curriculum to such resource constraints – the majority of materials apparently adopted a ‘traditional’ (White, European) narrative standpoint.

Teachers sometimes responded to resource constraints by authoring their own materials. As the availability and sophistication of reprographic technologies increased, the ‘home-brewed textbook’ was made available as a means by which the ‘gaps left by the professionals’ could be filled.[[543]](#footnote-544) The technique was reported to enjoy particular popularity amongst teachers of local and world history courses who found their work ill-served by published resources. David Warnes, a history teacher at Ipswich School, wrote in 1981 of his struggles with locating world history textbooks adequate to his needs. General textbooks, Warnes argued, tended to concentrate on the ‘First and Second Worlds at the expense of the Third’.[[544]](#footnote-545) Furthermore, their contents could quickly be invalidated and made anachronistic by political changes. Warnes’s own ‘home-brewed pamphlet’ on the history of Zimbabwe aimed to provide a level of detail not available in general texts, and to ‘bring the story right up to date’ – the format’s flexibility allowed him to add new information on the recent past, as and when it became available.

Teachers who chose to produce their own resources often began by locating source materials. Universities invested in the multicultural project sometimes attempted to make recent research available to teachers. In 1979, SOAS issued a source book for schoolteachers which surveyed contemporary knowledge of Chinese history, geography, economics, and culture.[[545]](#footnote-546) In other cases, teachers were themselves forced to take on the role of researchers. Requests to embassies for information on the countries they represented appear to have been common – so much so that embassy staff expressed frustration at their inundation with letters from teachers and students conducting topic work.[[546]](#footnote-547) *Clio* responded to complaints with an article which detailed guidelines for appropriate conduct when contacting embassies, in an effort to conserve time, resources, and goodwill. Warnes recommended Keesing’s Contemporary Archives, a summary of world news, as a useful source of facts, but cautioned his colleagues that ‘it doesn't always provide the interpretation and analysis that the ignorant researcher needs’.[[547]](#footnote-548) The authors of home-brewed textbooks enjoyed few opportunities to test their assumptions against other accounts of events, or to access varied historiographical perspectives. Edgington noted that innovative multicultural history courses had tended to produce their own course books to meet the specific needs of the individual school, but cautioned that this was a ‘counsel of excellence’ – an option out of the reach of many teachers who already found their time and resources stretched by the realities of quotidian working life.[[548]](#footnote-549) Demand from such teachers would eventually lead to the publication and distribution of materials used in experimental programmes like that at Tulse Hill.

Unsurprisingly, schools which had pioneered Black Studies were often at the forefront of attempts to introduce a permeative multicultural curriculum, as the tide turned in favour of the latter. By the mid-1970s, *Race Today* reported, the majority of students in attendance in Tulse Hill’s Black Studies classes were in fact White.[[549]](#footnote-550) *Race Today* interpreted the unanticipated popularity of the course with White pupils as a sign that allstudents, irrespective of race, sought knowledge of ‘revolutionary history’ not contained within the general curriculum. Their demand was taken seriously by Tulse Hill. In 1973, a whole-school conference, supported by the ILEA, was held in Eastbourne. Inspectors and other local authority workers attended alongside parents, senior students, and members of the wider community from which the school drew its pupils.[[550]](#footnote-551) The conference concluded that the standard history syllabus ‘did not cater for the interests of black pupils and that it did not provide enough working-class history.’ Henceforward, the school’s history department was to embark on a course of total curriculum revision, integrating the lessons of Black Studies into its general taught content.

The new history curriculum, pioneered by Nigel File, Chris Power, and Donald Hinds, embraced what Carter has described as the ‘history of everyday life’; a vision of the past which privileged the ‘ordinary’, often expressed through personal anecdote or material culture.[[551]](#footnote-552) File and Hinds condemned the reduction of history to a chronicle of ‘careers of leaders, kings and presidents’.[[552]](#footnote-553) History was of greatest interest, and greatest use, to students when it was ‘personalised’. The presence of ‘one’s own ancestors’ in the historical narrative was guaranteed to instil a sense of belonging in the historian. The challenge, then, was to ‘unlock the doors of the past and learn what they were doing’. File and Hinds cited *Roots* as an exemplar of historical research which started from the personal and familiar in its effort to understand the past.

Tulse Hill’s ‘Integrated Humanities’ course, which combined the teaching of English, geography, and history at lower secondary level, was revised to encompass a profoundly local orientation. The new course posited the question ‘Who are the British?’.[[553]](#footnote-554) Pupils studied the migration and settlement of the Celts, Romans, and Anglo-Saxons in their first year, and the Vikings, Normans, Jewish communities, African-Caribbeans and Huguenots in their second. The course did not present a fixed, pre-conceived notion of British national identity. Students were instead expected to consider questions of identity formation and the construction of the national idea. Teaching emphasised the ‘material survivals’ of the past as a central theme – inviting young people to study the legacy of the past as it manifested in quotidian life. To this end, the history of the community in which the school was situated was utilised.

In 1981, the course was developed into a textbook, *Black Settlers in Britain, 1555-1958*. When placed in dialogue with teachers’ reflections on the course, this allows us to reconstruct what might have been taught at Tulse Hill. The textbook used the term ‘black’ somewhat ambiguously. File and Hinds expressed a ‘personal view’ that blackness encompassed those drawn from ‘Afro-Asian-Caribbean’ backgrounds, but they argued that readers should ‘come to their own understanding’.[[554]](#footnote-555) In practice, the course materials focused exclusively on people of African-Caribbean heritage – a product of the racial makeup of Tulse Hill school, which drew the majority of its pupils from this community. In describing the course, I will therefore use ‘Black’ in preference to ‘black’.

The course moved in chronological order through significant themes and events in Black British history – including slavery, resistance, abolition, the Sierra Leone Resettlement Scheme, both World Wars, and the Notting Hill and Nottingham race riots of 1958. Topics were generally viewed through Black eyes, and often had some local connection. Slavery and Black resistance were explored through the lives of Francis Barber and Olaudah Equiano – former residents of Streatham and Blackheath, respectively.[[555]](#footnote-556) Black cultural achievement was symbolised by the actor Ira Aldridge, of Upper Norwood, and the musician Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, of Croydon. Tulse Hill’s teachers thus reworked the biographical school of history – which had traditionally been used to engage younger and ‘low-ability’ students, drawing on the lives of kings and queens – from a more egalitarian perspective.

File and Power, who co-authored *Black Settlers*, recognised biographies’ capacity to add human interest to history and engage the empathy of pupils. However, their writing offers no hint that analysis was sacrificed for storytelling. The textbook kept commentary to a minimum to allow space for full-page reproductions of original documents. The inclusion of these primary sources, first in Tulse Hill’s internal publications and later in the publicly available textbook, was part of a self-conscious attempt to democratise the narration of history. In the authors’ view, the opacity and exclusivity of ‘restricted-entry, specialist collections’ impinged upon the rights of communities to access ‘materials that are part of their cultural past’.[[556]](#footnote-557) *Black Settlers* aimed to place the tools of historical interpretation and understanding in the hands of those excluded from, or denied agency by, existing histories. Those taking the course were expected to reconstruct the lives of featured individuals from primary sources. In this sense, *Black Settlers* might be seen as a multicultural answer to *Jackdaws* or SCHP. Young people were treated as historians in their own right, with a unique contribution to make to the collective understanding of the past.

This entailed a reconceptualisation of the relative roles of teacher and student which went beyond the duty of care and responsiveness demanded by ‘child-centred’ learning. The course anticipated the mobilisation of an expansive community – encompassing parents, teachers, students, and locality – in the pursuit of historical knowledge and multicultural consciousness. *Black Settlers* featured the personal history of the Tulse Hill teacher Donald Hinds, whose life was used to illuminate the experiences of people of African-Caribbean descent in post-war Britain.[[557]](#footnote-558) Readers were informed of Hinds’ arrival in Plymouth in 1955, driven by the earlier migrations of close family members and by the scarcity of jobs in contemporary Jamaica; his early encounters with housing discrimination; and his subsequent careers as a student, a bus conductor, writer, civil servant, and teacher. Hinds thus opened intimate details from his professional and personal life to his pupils. Students were expected to use these materials responsibly in their capacity as historians.

*Black Settlers* challenged pupils and teachers across the country to research ‘life stories’ like that of Hinds.[[558]](#footnote-559) In setting this task, the authors drew on both the legacy of ‘histories of everyday life’ and the BEM. Supplementary schools fostered Black historical writing as a form of identity formation and declaration. Young people were encouraged to place the self in an unbroken historical tradition of pride in organised resistance. Within the Tulse Hill course, the emphasis shifted from the self-narration of Black young people to self-narration of an older generation, facilitated by the pupil as historian. The goal here was not to inculcate a radical Black consciousness, but rather to reaffirm the place of Black Britons within the national story and – to paraphrase E.P. Thompson – to save Black voices from the ‘enormous condescension of posterity’.[[559]](#footnote-560)

The textbook expressed an earnest hope that they would record as many stories as possible, by tape or on paper. Students were advised that it would be easy to find individuals who had lived through the war.[[560]](#footnote-561) Black veterans were to be encouraged to tell their stories, as Alfred Moore and Theo Campbell had done in *Black Settlers.* White interviewees should be questioned on their memories of Black people and their reception in war-time Britain. Pupils who were especially lucky might also find links with Black people who lived in Britain prior to the Second World War, especially if they were residents of Bristol, Cardiff, Liverpool, South Shields or London. Nevertheless, *Black Settlers* was careful to inform learners that ‘everyone has their own story to tell’. The life-histories of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s had equal intrinsic historical value and could be accessed in the everyday worlds of young people. As File and Hinds put it, the Tulse Hill curriculum – drawing as it did on the knowledge of pupils, teachers, and the wider community – produced history ‘not only from the bottom up, but sideways as well’.[[561]](#footnote-562)

*Black Settlers* was not unique in its engagement of local histories and respect for the pupil-as-historian. Hackney Downs School, a north London comprehensive, structured their ‘Integrated Humanities’ course in a similar manner to Tulse Hill. Their thematic approach included a study on ‘The Movement of People’.[[562]](#footnote-563) The historical dimensions of migration were explored through the Angles and Saxons, the nineteenth century Irish, and ‘the continued and complex movements of the people of the Caribbean’. The course valorised ‘personal anecdote’, treating the life-stories of young people and their families as legitimate historical sources. Confronted with the experiential knowledge of their peers, pupils and teachers were expected to gain insight into the affective dimensions of migration, alongside the drier, more abstract ‘network of social and economic factors’ which exerted push and pull influences on migrants.

The biographies of local people exemplified imperial relationships and could be used to uncover the centrality of empire to modern British life. This approach was best articulated by Sylvia L. Collicott, a member of the Multicultural Curriculum Support Group in the neighbouring borough of Haringey. Collicott argued that the life stories of local inhabitants, whether ‘soldiers, nurses, colonial civil servants, traders’, or simply ordinary people ‘who benefitted from a higher standard of living’, were evidence of the formative impact of the empire on British society.[[563]](#footnote-564) Framed in these terms, imperialism could not be understood as an abstract phenomenon ‘divorced from the main stream [*sic*] of British history’. The study of local history helped to reveal a nation whose ‘industrial and political’ processes were moulded by extraction from the wider world.[[564]](#footnote-565) Likewise, a teacher in Whitehaven – a port town on England’s north-west coast – reflected that their predominantly White student body seemed to find it easier to empathise with enslaved people when this history was presented in connection with their town’s history of complicity in the slave trade.[[565]](#footnote-566)

The establishment of an affective identification with historical figures also appeared in the curriculum of Vauxhall Manor Girls’ School – a south London comprehensive whose pupils were predominantly of African-Caribbean descent. Vauxhall Manor offered a third-year history course, ‘People on the Move to Britain’, which used drama to foster empathy and emotional understanding amongst pupils.[[566]](#footnote-567) The course featured a case study on the 1786 Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, a coercive scheme which sought to ‘repatriate’ London’s ‘Black Poor’ (a community consisting primarily of formerly enslaved people and their descendants) to Sierra Leone. Pupils were encouraged to take on the role of the ‘Black Poor’ while contemporary newspaper accounts were read to them, and then to articulate their feelings in character. It was hoped that the exercise would historicise the mutable yet durable nature of racism as a system of oppression – and locate the roots of students’ own experiences in the imperial past.

Vauxhall Manor’s drama department, headed by Elyse Dodgson, worked closely with the history department to co-produce the third-year course.[[567]](#footnote-568) Under Dodgson’s leadership, the drama department also pursued independent historical ventures – most notably, the development of the play *Motherland*. In 1981, former pupil Marcia Smith was awarded a Greater London Council (GLC) grant to ‘interview her mother’s generation of West Indian Women in the local community’.[[568]](#footnote-569) Dodgson was simultaneously funded by ILEA to ‘develop materials which would help teachers to confront, through drama, issues in women's studies and multi-cultural education’. Smith and Dodgson combined their projects to produce a play focusing on the migration experiences of West Indian women in the 1950s. Smith’s initial interviews took her own mother and other female relatives as their subjects and gradually expanded to encompass twenty-three members of the local community. Recordings of their experiences provided the basis for an initial script, developed and acted by Vauxhall Manor students. Over half the interviewees were mothers of girls in the play.

Rehearsals were open to interviewees and the script was placed under a continual process of revision until the first performance; the actors were accountable to their elders and were eager to ensure that the older generation were comfortable with the interpretation of their life-stories offered by the play.[[569]](#footnote-570) As such, *Motherland* was an expression of rich intergenerational dialogue. One student described participation in the play as an exercise in finally understanding ‘what your parents always told you’. For Dodgson, *Motherland* represented an exercise in historical empathy; it enabled students to draw connections between their own experience and that of the interviewees.[[570]](#footnote-571) To be an oral historian was to reevaluate the relationship between past and present, to understand the living dimensions of history and the centrality of memory to social identity. The strengthening of community – a potential bulwark against racism – was the anticipated result. Like *Black Settlers,* the project was made available for broader dissemination through its publication by Heinemann, in the form of a textbook (*Motherland: West Indian Women to Britain in the 1950s*).[[571]](#footnote-572)

The pupil-as-historian seems to have been a common enough feature of multicultural history to merit a note of caution in *Clio.* Caroline Adams, who had previously authored an oral history drawing on the memories of older members of London’s Bangladeshi community, warned teachers that oral history was not simply ‘a matter of sending children out with tape recorders’.[[572]](#footnote-573) Young people needed significant contextual knowledge about the historical periods in question to be able to ask questions and understand the answers which they were given. More importantly, elderly people were ‘not just alternative “people’s” history books’, or mines of historical information waiting to be extracted by the young. Interviewers must respect and recognise interviewees’ full humanity – memories and lives must be treated with ‘care and respect’, or produce a legacy of damage and mistrust.

The vogue for the pupil-as-historian recognised the power of young people to contribute to historical knowledge. It is therefore frustrating – and not a little sad – that the research produced by these projects has left so little trace in the archives. Except from rare, published accounts like *Motherhood*, the many oral histories produced by school children during this period do not seem to have been deemed worthy of preservation. At best, we might hope that these histories remain ephemera collected in the attics and cupboards of former teachers and pupils. Ironically, *Black Settlers* chose to emphasise that the inherent historical value of the individual life-history applied to pupils themselves. Those following the course were advised to engage in practices of self-archiving; personal collections of ‘newspapers and magazines about the experiences of black people in Britain today’ would help future historians tease out the knots of the past.[[573]](#footnote-574) The difficulty of recovering youth-authored histories demonstrates some of limitations of the multicultural history curriculum, as practised in schools. Beyond the enthusiasm of individual teachers, there was limited institutional backing for these projects: children’s curation of history stopped short of being inscribed in the collections of museums, libraries, and archives. Within the context of the BEM, which drew on the resources of an organised community, such histories were successfully preserved. Their ephemeral nature in the context of state schooling illustrates the problem of divorcing the educational techniques of the BEM from their original context.

Carter argues that the ‘history of everyday life’ fell apart in the context of the multi-racial comprehensive school, which exposed its inability to ‘speak to issues of power’.[[574]](#footnote-575) This was a form of social history, she concludes, in which ‘objects were not imperial, spaces were not gendered, and feelings were not burdened with class encounter’. The experiments in Tulse Hill, Hackney Downs, and Vauxhall Manor lend themselves to a different conclusion; ‘histories of everyday life’ could be used to promote affective understanding of experiences of migration and racism, and to expose the intrusion of empire into the fabric of British daily life. These results could be achieved without prejudicing the academic attainment of young people of colour by confining them to non-examinable forms of study.

Nevertheless, there were undoubtedly many schools where similar techniques were moulded by racist assumptions. The fascination of the history of everyday life with object-based learning invited the performance of fixed, preconceived notions of cultural difference in multiracial settings. School events designed to celebrate Britain’s cultural diversity often invited offerings of ‘traditional’ clothing and food. Refracted through orientalist notions of the ‘exotic’, cultures were stripped of their living dynamism, humanity and complexity.[[575]](#footnote-576) As a result, these events inadvertently reaffirmed the connection between Whiteness and national belonging.

The School Council’s *Education for a Multiracial Society: Curriculum and Context 5-13,* offers another window into the confluence between histories of everyday life and multicultural education in the classrooms of the early 1980s. One school described in the survey (a ‘multiracial’ London primary) decided to conduct a ‘study of India’.[[576]](#footnote-577) Teachers used an array of learning resources: publications from the Commonwealth Institute, Oxfam, and travel agencies were employed alongside daytrips to the Victoria and Albert Museum and a nearby gurdwara. However, ‘the children themselves’ were considered the most valuable source of information on Indian history. As was par for the course for school-based inquiries into the ‘history of everyday life’, the project rested on object-based learning. Pupils were encouraged to locate material remnants of the past in their immediate surroundings – including in the family home. Teachers observed that it was ‘white children with Indian connections’ who were the first to offer ‘artefacts and memento’. ‘Indian connections’ was, of course, a gentle mask placed over the face of history; the dominance and subjugation of the colonial relationship was subsumed within a cosy – comfortingly domestic – narrative of a common past. This is a clear example of the ‘history of everyday life’s’ occlusion of ‘issues of power’, as described by Carter.[[577]](#footnote-578)

It does not seem to have occurred to teachers (or School Council observers) to interrogate the comparative reluctance of Indian children to contribute ‘offerings’ to the school display. These pupils’ initial unwillingness to participate was reported as an insignificant consequence of collective ‘diffidence’ which was quickly overcome.[[578]](#footnote-579) No mention was made of the structural reasons for which White students might feel more confident speaking of India than their Indian peers – nor of the empire which lay at their heart, and which was supposedly the topic under examination. The project’s wilful blindness to of the history of racial oppression led directly to its perpetuation. Indian pupils were subsequently encouraged to contribute ‘artefacts’ of their own (with some enthusiasm) and several Indian parents became ‘unofficial topic advisers’. As we have seen, however, the participation of people of colour in ‘multicultural’ educational endeavours was not a guarantee that their cultures would be represented in their reality – as infinitely complex, living entities.

**Anti-Racist Education**

Multicultural curricula were able to interrogate racism, but the multicultural approach did not *necessitate* such engagement. Decoupled from any form of social analysis, multiculturalism risked becoming an exercise in the promotion of essentialised and depoliticised cultural identities, made palatable to White audiences. Barry Troyna referred to the ‘Three S’s approach’, in which singular cultural symbols (‘saris, samosas, and steelbands’) were marketed as metonyms for an exotic, abstracted identity.[[579]](#footnote-580) As the Institute of Race Relations argued in its evidence to the Rampton Committee, to learn about other cultures – often, of course, the cultures of Others – did not require a critical awareness of one’s own. Thus, education risked becoming ‘an adjustment processes within a racialist society and not as a force for changing the values that make our society racist’.[[580]](#footnote-581)

The IRR spearheaded calls for an ‘anti-racist education’ which would foster ‘critical judgement’ of students’ (and teachers’) beliefs and their ‘interrelationship with the actual structure of society’.[[581]](#footnote-582) As this implies, anti-racist and multicultural educators sometimes regarded themselves as two mutually hostile camps. Others, however, saw no inherent contradiction between anti-racist and multicultural work – a testament to the breadth, diversity, and lack of coherence of both movements. File and Hinds of Tulse Hill, for example, were eager to emphasise that their vision of multiculturalism was *not* ‘steel drums and saris’; rather, the course’s focus on multicultural histories was laden with the anti-racist potentiality of critiques of the imperial power structure.[[582]](#footnote-583)

Campaigns for anti-racist education placed history at their very heart. All London Teachers Against Racism and Fascism (ALTARF) was a teacher-led group committed to opposing the presence of racist and fascist ideologies within schools.[[583]](#footnote-584) Their curricular policies focused on history and the social sciences, which ALTARF described as the ‘ideal’ subjects for anti-racist teaching. History in particular was considered to offer wide scope for exploring the ‘clear material reasons for the racism of present society’ – namely the ‘crucial issue’ of imperialism.

Beginning in 1982, the IRR published a series of books which sought to teach the ‘history of black-white relations from the vantage point of the black experience’ (‘black’ being used here in its political sense).[[584]](#footnote-585) Race was presented as a product of the coloniser’s need to justify the humiliation and exploitation of colonised peoples; thus historicised, the concept was denaturalised and opened to critique. Contemporary economic divides – between White communities and people of colour in the metropole, and between Global North and Global South – were situated in the context of the imperial extraction of wealth. Young people were invited to adjust their assessment of the ‘Industrial Revolution’ – a canonical element of secondary school history teaching – in line with this information. Britain’s much-vaunted ‘industrial development’ was attributed to an ‘enormous injection of profit and wealth’ derived from the slave trade, rather than a national genius for invention.[[585]](#footnote-586) In the IRR’s telling, empire moved to the centre of the national story. History was the tool used to expose the foundations of British life, in the hope that they would be contested by the rising generation.

The work of anti-racist campaigners bore fruit in changes to ILEA policy. As the 1980s advanced, the authority began to incorporate the language of anti-racism into official publications. The ILEA’s *Anti-Racist Statement and Guidelines*, published in 1983, noted that British racism could not be properly understood without reference to ‘historical factors’ – including ‘the special character of the colonial and neo-colonial relationship’ between Britain and much of the Global South.[[586]](#footnote-587) If the roots of racism – sunk deep into inherited political, economic, and social structures – were not recognised, they could not be destroyed. Likewise, the ILEA’s guidance encouraged teachers to understand immigration within ‘the wider framework of colonialism’.[[587]](#footnote-588) The authority supplied a potted history of migration, stretching back to the sixteenth century, which reinforced Sivanandan’s famous maxim: ‘we are here because you were there’ (the IRR’s work was favourably quoted later in the document).

There was a clear demand for support with anti-racist work in the history classroom. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported that the IRR’s book series was popular and widely distributed.[[588]](#footnote-589) So, too, was a set of twelve posters – titled *Whose World is the World* – which were produced by London’s radical, anti-colonialist Poster Film Collective in 1979. The collective set out to challenge dominant understandings of history by positing the colonial extraction of wealth as ‘the basis for the development of Western economic power over the last 400 years’.[[589]](#footnote-590)

The popular appetite for anti-racist teaching aids was encapsulated by the work of a group of practising teachers seconded to the ILEA’s ‘Anti-Racist Strategies Team’. In the summer of 1985, the team requested that the ILEA Television (TV) and Publishing Centre produce a video based on a set of tape-slides they had created.[[590]](#footnote-591) These tape-slides explored the link between Britain’s ‘Imperialist past’ and ‘“immigrant obsessed” present’. The group contended that the authority had previously offered ‘no material at all on this topic’, and that the gap must be filled as a matter of urgency. Their accusation was unfounded; the Poster Film Collective seem to have worked with the ILEA to distribute *Whose World is the World*, and *Clio,* the officialnewsletter of the authority’s History and Social Sciences Teachers’ Centre, offered a sustained engagement with related histories.[[591]](#footnote-592) Nevertheless, subsequent events demonstrate the sheer strength of feeling on the matter. When the TV and Publishing Centre refused to accommodate the project – citing packed filming schedules and a supposed lack of commercial viability – the teachers involved decided to create an independent film and publishing company, assisted by the Association for Curriculum Development (the ACD). The ACD successfully applied for a grant from the Greater London Council to buy the video and editing equipment which would guarantee that ‘this and other anti-racist resources could be produced’.[[592]](#footnote-593) The result was a video and companion book, both titled *A History of Racism.* Despite initial budget constraints, which forced the ACD to depend exclusively on word-of-mouth reviews for publicity, sales were so high that the proceeds alone enabled the organisation to run a small office to expand their work.

*A History of Racism* bore significant parallels with the IRR’s series, which was recommended to educators in its bibliography.[[593]](#footnote-594) Most notably, both sought to contest the media’s portrayal of communities in the Global South as ‘passive’, ‘pathetic’, or ‘hapless’ victims of decontextualised, random disasters (the so-called ‘Oxfam image’). [[594]](#footnote-595) The IRR and the ACD viewed histories of anti-colonial resistance as repositories of political power: it was hoped that young people – and especially young people of colour – would come to understand themselves as historical agents, in dialogue with the struggles of the past. *A History of Racism* went so far as to describe the omission of histories of anti-colonial resistance from school textbooks as a dangerous practice.[[595]](#footnote-596) To erase these histories, the authors believed, was to curtail the potentialities of an anti-racist future.

As in the BEM, the interlinked concepts of the pupil-as-historian and the pupil-as-history-maker continually recurred in guidance for anti-racist history teaching. For example, teachers at Hackney Downs school warned that their well-meaning colleagues risked doing ‘more harm than good’ by working exclusively on the brutality of slavery.[[596]](#footnote-597) Such histories had the potential to plunge pupils into a ‘bewildering sense of oppression and desire to resist’, unmoored from feelings of hope or the possibility of successful struggle. Hackney Downs instead offered a narrative of historic Black achievement. It argued that a ‘rich and varied’ Black cultural life had thrived and endured against all the odds. The teachers recognised the impossibility of eliminating racism via curricular changes alone. Instead, they hoped to create ‘more meaningful and intelligent context’ in which it could be discussed, and resistance theorised.

Anti-racist history teaching was lent urgency by the prominence of Britain’s organised far-right during this period. It drew heavily upon the discourses of the anti-fascist movement, which used history to hold a mirror to the present. In 1980, the self-described ‘Revolutionary Socialist Feminist organisation’ Big Flame produced a pamphlet entitled *The Past Against Our Future: Fighting Racism and Fascism.[[597]](#footnote-598)* Anti-fascists were instructed to study the history of their movement, ‘in order to learn from our successes and failures’.[[598]](#footnote-599) The idea was not simply to stop history from repeating itself – a phrase which siloes violence into self-contained and decontextualised tragedies. Instead, the group presented a vision of historical continuum, in which British imperialism, the fascist mass movements of the 1920s and 1930s, and the ‘British racist state of to-day [sic]’ were fundamentally linked. The constant yet flexible brutality of racism needed to be countered by movement informed of its different historical permutations.

Unsurprisingly, this period witnessed the first coherent attempts to place Holocaust education on school curricula. The East London Auschwitz Exhibition (1983) was the first of its kind in the United Kingdom.[[599]](#footnote-600) Almost 11,000 pupils visited the exhibition over the course of just five weeks; many attended as part of organised school parties. The London Auschwitz Education Group’s (LAEG) companion materials aimed to give the Holocaust its ‘long-overdue place on the secondary curricular map’.[[600]](#footnote-601) The group was driven by a desire to counter the rise of Holocaust denialism amongst young people, who were a popular target for the leafletting campaigns of the far-right.[[601]](#footnote-602) LAEG’s teachers’ pack, *Auschwitz: Yesterday’s Racism,* described knowledge of the Holocaust as ‘essential to any serious examination of current manifestations of racism’.[[602]](#footnote-603) It concluded with the hope that:

Through gaining an understanding of the conditions which encourage and sustain overt racism, and by witnessing what it can lead to, today’s generation can resist similar prejudices and their consequences. For there is no certainty that this will not happen again to the Jews and other religious or “racial” groups.[[603]](#footnote-604)

LAEG’s understanding of the role of Holocaust education in anti-racist pedagogies was subtly distinct from that of anti-fascist groups like Big Flame. LAEG believed that the history of the Holocaust necessarily illuminated other forms of racism. Paradoxically, it did not situate the Holocaust within a historical continuum of racist state violence. Indeed, LAEG’s teaching materials claimed that antisemitism was ‘unique’ amongst ideologies of race in its culmination in genocide (‘the deliberate and carefully planned extermination of an entire people aided by the technology of the “civilised” modern world’).[[604]](#footnote-605)

The language of ‘civilisation’ permeated LAEG’s work. Another resource in their Auschwitz teaching pack drew the following lesson from the history of the Holocaust:

Education and “civilisation” are no safeguard against inhumanity – […] a cultured and educated society like Germany was ready to perpetrate appalling injustices upon fellow human beings to the point of mass murder on an unprecedented (and unrepeated) scale.[[605]](#footnote-606)

An insistence on the singularity of the Holocaust foreclosed understanding of its colonial antecedents. As Jürgen Zimmerer has argued, such understandings posit Nazi brutality as an unexplained deviation from – rather than a symptom of – the ‘grand narrative’ of Enlightenment modernity.[[606]](#footnote-607) In fact, the strategies of European colonial rule normalised understandings of ‘space’ and ‘race’ which would later culminate in the Nazi policies of ‘conquest and extermination’. White supremacy and its tools of domination (eugenics; wars of extermination; containment; deportation) were born out of a colonial context before being married to antisemitism and enlisted by the Nazi government. LAEG’s surprise that ‘civilisation’ – an imperial concept of White historical superiority – did not inoculate Germans against mass murder is telling.[[607]](#footnote-608) It was the logical endpoint of the organisation’s blindness to the continuity of empire and genocide.

Michael Rothberg and Miriam Hensen offer approaches to Holocaust education which help to clarify the distinction between LAEG and Big Flame. Rothberg argues that an ‘ugly contest of comparative victimization’ has appeared, in which the Holocaust is set against ‘global histories of racism, slavery, and colonialism’.[[608]](#footnote-609) Those who claim that an emphasis on Holocaust remembrance marginalises other traumas and, conversely, those who defend the Holocaust’s singularity, are both motivated by a conception of memory as a zero-sum-game. Counter to this assumption, Rothberg theorises that memory operates dialectically, ‘through negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing’ (what he terms ‘multidirectional memory’). Thus, memory of the Holocaust is a vector through which ‘other histories of suffering’ can find expression, but the emergence of Holocaust memory is itself ‘inflected by histories of slavery, colonialism, and decolonization’. The work of Big Flame is exemplary in this regard.

Miriam Hansen contends that the dominance of the Holocaust in American cultures of remembrance acts as a Freudian ‘screen memory which covers up a ‘traumatic event […] that cannot be approached directly’.[[609]](#footnote-610) By focusing on the Holocaust, Americans externalise the violence of genocide and slave-labour, displacing their own guilt onto another historical actor. Rothberg’s work suggests that such displacement can function ‘as much to open up lines of communication with the past as to close them off’.[[610]](#footnote-611) Nevertheless, displacement must be taken seriously as a strategy of attempted memory-making – irrespective of actual success.

There is ample evidence that both German and north American histories have been used as distancing mechanisms in British classrooms. Gillian Klein – a former school librarian and educational researcher with the ILEA and Schools Council – advised teachers that it was possible to ‘distance racism’ by tracing the rise of anti-Semitism in the 1930s.[[611]](#footnote-612) The ‘distancing’ mechanism envisaged by Klein seems to have been temporal rather than geographical; there is no implication in her work that British complicity was to be excluded from analysis. LAEG’s resources, referenced above, certainly raised the question of British collaboration and fascist sympathisers.[[612]](#footnote-613) Nevertheless, this connection was not always drawn. File and Hinds presented Tulse Hill’s teaching of ‘the domestic variety of Mosleyism’ as a point of note, implying that it might have been unusual in this regard.[[613]](#footnote-614) It certainly seems that a pioneering Holocaust project delivered in Hull secondary schools concentrated exclusively on Nazi-occupied Europe, without reference to the parallel rise of British antisemitism and aspects of British complicity (through, for example, the state’s hostile policy towards refugees).[[614]](#footnote-615)

Likewise, File drew attention to the role a study of ‘racism, civil rights and black power in the United States’ could play for teachers who wanted to raise the problem of racial discrimination without the risk of inviting discussion ‘on the British situation’.[[615]](#footnote-616) File’s recommendation is all the more striking given that, by his own admission, the US context was ‘severely underresourced’, with little available other than ‘monographs on the life of Martin Luther King or dated surveys of the history of black people in general without too much mention of black power’.

File did not explain why teachers feared invoking the spectre of ‘personal positions’ on British racism, but we can infer the answer from other sources.[[616]](#footnote-617) One secondary school teacher shared her doubts that colleagues might in fact be creating a ‘colour problem by talking about it [race] so much’.[[617]](#footnote-618) This teacher’s assumption that discussion of race would *materialise* a divisive race-consciousness seems a particularly extreme iteration of a common position. Others worried that such conversations would bring already-simmering racial tensions to a boil.[[618]](#footnote-619) In this context, the distancing study of American histories became a tool of classroom management.

Uncertainty about whether or not it was appropriate for educators to express their own views about ‘controversial’ subjects compounded these anxieties.[[619]](#footnote-620) In 1984, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, Keith Joseph, issued the following advice on the expression of personal opinions in a classroom context:

If asked by pupils for their own views teachers should, as appropriate, declare where they as individuals stand, but explain at the same time that others, in particular the pupils’ parents and other teachers may disagree with them. The teacher should explain that such disagreements are legitimate given the complexity and value-laden nature of the issues and that the pupils too need to weigh the evidence and considerations for themselves and try to reach their own opinions, respecting as they do the possible contrary opinions of others.[[620]](#footnote-621)

As we will see in Chapter 4, however, teachers were working in a politically febrile environment during which their personal positions on race and empire could easily come under scrutiny at a national level, in press and Parliament. Given this context, it is unsurprising that some chose to avoid confronting British racism directly – locating discrimination outside of the national body politic and hoping that students would connect the dots with their own experiences.

The use of US histories as a distancing mechanism has left its trace in today’s school curricula. In 2014, ‘Civil Rights in the USA (1865-1992)’ closely followed ‘Russian Dictatorship (1855 to 1992)’ as the second most popular syllabus offered by the Oxford, Cambridge, and Royal Society of Arts Examinations Board (OCR) A Level History course.[[621]](#footnote-622) A striking 29 percent of schools opted for the former topic. A subsequent (2021) survey conducted by the HA found that just 23 percent of schools reported ‘devoting a series of lessons to teaching an aspect of Black or Asian British history’.[[622]](#footnote-623) The majority (57 percent) reported teaching such histories in just one or two lessons, while a substantial minority taught none at all. Intriguingly, the survey report noted that, although respondents had been asked specifically about Black and Asian *British* history, some ‘cited topics that did not appear to be directly related to Britain at all’. The ‘struggle for civil rights in the United States’ was the most common answer in this respect.

The latter could simply indicate carelessness in reading the survey’s questions. However, that the same mistake was made repeatedly – and usually with the same result – should give us pause for thought. It leaves the impression that, for many teachers, Black and Asian history *is* US history. This implies a certain overwriting of British histories of race and racism with north American histories – both on syllabi, and in the minds of educators. The writer Reni Eddo-Lodge has described how her encounters with ‘black history’ across primary and secondary education were exclusively ‘American-centric’:

With a heavy focus on Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman’s Underground Railroad and Martin Luther King, Jr, the household names of America’s civil rights movement felt important to me, but also a million miles away from my life as a young black girl growing up in north London.[[623]](#footnote-624)

It is reasonable to conjecture that the disconnect Eddo-Lodge felt from histories of race and resistance was an intended consequence, not a byproduct, of an ‘American-centric’ curriculum, given the precedent of using foreign histories as a distancing mechanism. As Rothberg contends, memory is not a zero-sum game, and consciousness of US histories in the UK does not *necessarily* preclude understanding of the domestic dimensions of race. Yet Webster suggests that the idea of Britain as a ‘liberal and tolerant’ society is an important component of national identity and self-representation on the world stage.[[624]](#footnote-625) In the twentieth century it was also reliant upon constructing the nation in opposition to states such as the USA, South Africa, or Nazi Germany. There is a clear risk that English history curricula construct racism as a distinctively foreign problem, external to the national body politic.[[625]](#footnote-626) This breeds denialism and a refusal to confront the specificities of English racism, including its imperial heritage.

**Racism Awareness Training and the Ends of Anti-Racism**

Human Awareness Training (HAT) emerged in the USA in the late 1960s, in response to the gathering strength of the civil rights and black power movements.[[626]](#footnote-627) HAT – which would subsequently be renamed Racism Awareness Training (RAT) – approached racism as broadly interpersonal issue, rather than a structural problem. It located racism in the psychology of the individual, informed by history and culture: racism, proponents argued, was the inevitable product of ‘prejudice plus power’. Sivanandan described how ‘renegades from the multicultural faith’ formed the vector by which RAT was first introduced in the UK.[[627]](#footnote-628) In 1978, a group of ‘teachers and community workers’ founded the Racism Awareness Programme Unit (RAPU). This was an outgrowth of their campaign challenging racism in children’s books, which was heavily inflected by the work of the Council for Interracial Books – a US-based organisation which espoused RAT. In Sivanandan’s eyes, the campaign’s preoccupation with racial *identity* (as constructed by stereotyped representations in print and visual media) prepared the ground for an approach to anti-racism which set personal attitudinal changes as its goal. Read in this light, RAT can be viewed as the logical outgrowth of the same concepts of ‘self-image’ which had long structured calls for multicultural education.

The Swann and Rampton reports espoused a vision of racism which was bounded by the psychological: racism, as defined by the latter, comprised ‘*a set of attitudes and behaviour* towards people of another race which is based on the belief that races are distinct [emphasis added]’.[[628]](#footnote-629) In the wake of the urban rebellions of 1981, the state doubled down on the framing of racism as an interpersonal problem.[[629]](#footnote-630) The Scarman Report – a government inquiry into the rebellion in Brixton – can be read as a strategic attempt to ‘shift the object of anti-racist struggle from the state to the individual, from changing society to changing people’.[[630]](#footnote-631)

RAT’s institutionalisation was emblematic of this strategy. Scarman acquitted the police force of accusations that it was intended to function as ‘the oppressive arm of a racist state’, or even that racism *within* the force played a guiding role in its actions.[[631]](#footnote-632) Racism was neither systematic nor institutional; rather, it was occasionally manifested ‘in the behaviour of a few officers on the streets’. Even this was explained away as an ‘error of judgement’ which equated ‘all young black people’ with criminality in the face of an ‘the inexorably rising tide of street crime’. As a corrective to these prejudices, Scarman recommended training to promote sensitivity to the needs of a ‘multi-racial society’.

However, the report could not ignore the broader marginalisation – economic, social, and political – to which people of colour were subjected. In its hurry to exculpate the state, Scarman instead blamed the community: it presented young people of colour, and especially young Black people, as victims of their own cultural deficiencies.[[632]](#footnote-633) Racial *disadvantage*, rather than racial discrimination, was the watchword here.[[633]](#footnote-634) In terms reminiscent of the Moynihan Report, which had attributed Black poverty in the US to a higher incidence of single-mother families, Scarman ascribed deprivation to ‘lack of close parental support’ (especially the absence of a father figure) and the ‘failure of black youths to acquire sufficiently early the skills of language and literacy’.[[634]](#footnote-635) A section notionally devoted to discrimination in the job market was prefaced by a list of other factors which were believed to contribute to high unemployment in communities of colour, including ‘difficulties arising from unrealistic expectations, bad time-keeping, unwillingness to travel, and trouble with the English language’.[[635]](#footnote-636)

The Scarman report marked a reorientation in government policy which would have serious repercussions for Britain’s anti-racist movement. Contemporaries identified the inquiry itself with a cynical attempt to manufacture consent for the state’s chosen solutions by means of an illusory process of consultation. The Brixton Defence Campaign, created to support arrestees in the aftermath of the rebellion, encouraged local people to boycott the inquiry, arguing that the consultative process aimed to co-opt communities into the logic of state repression.[[636]](#footnote-637) Similarly, the Moss Side Defence Committee boycotted the Manchester-based Hytner Inquiry, in the belief that cosmetic reforms would reconcile the community to a form of state racism which remained ‘substantially unchanged’.

RAT’s atomisation of racism aided and abetted the process of co-optation. As Sivanandan put it, ‘the unit of oppression for RAT is the abstract individual’.[[637]](#footnote-638) RAT, and the model of funding to which it was attached, prioritised the individual success story over support for communities. The problem was compounded by an accompanying ‘ethnicisation’ of politics: the state identified distinct ‘ethnic’ groups and targeted funding accordingly. Thus, anti-racist groups were encouraged to redirect their efforts from community self-help to state-supported self-elevation and locked into a competitive struggle for resources.[[638]](#footnote-639) This had the effect of professionalising and dividing the movement and contributed to the collapse of the community-in-struggle symbolised by the concept of political blackness.[[639]](#footnote-640)

RAT was rightly criticised for obscuring the structural nature of racism, but it is easy to overstate the extent to which it represented a divergence from previous practice. Anti-racist education, like multicultural education, was always underpinned by a psychological logic: its central purpose was to change hearts and minds. At best, educators could hope that young people would be moved to struggle for change at a structural level.[[640]](#footnote-641) Sivanandan distinguished *racialism* – the prejudiced attitudes of an individual – from structural *racism*. While racialism afforded its bearer no ‘intrinsic power’, racism derived such power from ‘laws, constitutional conventions, judicial precedents, institutional practices – all of which have the imprimatur of the state’.[[641]](#footnote-642) Thus, the battle against racism necessarily encompassed a battle against the state.

As this implies, truly structural and systematic understandings of racism do not leave room for faith in the reformability of the state education system. They argue that the system is working as intended in reproducing racial hierarchy, and that the only solution is to work outside of or in conflict with this system. Ultimately, regardless of whether schools privileged the study of structural and institutional racism or of personal prejudice, teachers were always working at the level of individual attitudinal change. The quest to counter personal prejudice brought teachers into confrontation with the informal education received by young people, in the form of a hostile and hierarchical popular culture.

**Education in Prejudice: Cultural Influences on Young People’s Concepts of History**

As previously described, knowledge presented in a classroom setting inevitably undergoes a process of contestation and transformation. Some of the projects outlined above acknowledged and engaged pupils as co-producers of historical knowledge, allowing for open-ended dialogue and continual revision of ideas. Failure to acknowledge youth agency, however, could render education for attitudinal change pedagogically problematic. Chris Gaine, a secondary school teacher in ‘Integrated Humanities’, acknowledged educators’ fears that pupils would reject anti-racism as part of their broader hostility to ‘school knowledge’.[[642]](#footnote-643) He expressed optimism that the right material, properly taught, could have a positive impact on pupils, but acknowledged the risk that ‘if the material is presented as the way nice people like teachers think’, then some would be instinctively hostile.

Teachers who attempted to ‘bank’ knowledge of race and empire in their students were indeed often frustrated by indifference or hostility.[[643]](#footnote-644) In one history class observed by the Schools Council, young people dutifully copied down the information they were offered on the Indian independence movement, but displayed no other signs of engagement with the material.[[644]](#footnote-645) A multicultural humanities course, which focused alternately on Africa, the Caribbean, and India, met with protests from a group of second-year girls, who contended that the teaching was anti-national. The girls demanded that they learn ‘about our own country’ and approvingly cited their mothers’ claims that multicultural education amounted to ‘brainwashing’.[[645]](#footnote-646)

Likewise, White eleven- and twelve-year-olds in an outer-London school responded to a humanities study on India with calls to ‘do more about England’.[[646]](#footnote-647) These pupils mobilised their new knowledge of the history of Indian independence to support calls for repatriation. Their argument rested on two conceits: the notion that a kind of reverse colonisation was at play in Indian migration to Britain (‘if Indians had a right to India the British had a right to Britain’) and that ‘rights were accompanied by duties and Indians should stay in their own country, building it up and eliminating poverty’. Both were guided by ignorance (wilful or otherwise) of differential power dynamics, economic and human extraction which comprised colonialism and its legacies. Underlying their anger was a familiar notion of memory as a zero-sum-game.[[647]](#footnote-648)

At best, classroom-based approaches to multicultural and anti-racist education could give young people the tools to critically appraise the information they received from external sources, including family, friends, and media.[[648]](#footnote-649) Educators noted the subtle ways in which popular television programming could undermine the anti-racist message.[[649]](#footnote-650) Mark Puddy, in a 1985 edition of *Multicultural Teaching*, went so far as to present teachers as engaged in a battle for hearts and minds with the (vastly better resourced and more engaging) education offered by major TV stations.[[650]](#footnote-651) He criticised the tendency of broadcast media to present people in the Global South as ‘undernourished, poorly educated and poverty stricken’ – and dependent upon the Global North for their survival. These narratives naturalised an economic divide in fact produced by colonialism, while representing a racialised agent/dependent binary. Puddy situated such coverage within a broader ideological complex produced by present-day neo-colonialism; the need to preserve countries in the Global South as ‘markets for Britain's goods, suppliers of Britain's raw materials and a source of cheap labour’.

The ‘balloon game’ experiment invited young people to image themselves flying in a hot air balloon which, out of control, deposits them in a country which they would rather have avoided; their observations were then written up as a short story. The Schools Council conducted the experiment with groups of nine- to eleven-year-olds in various locations in England, whose stories often featured ‘African settings’ of some description.[[651]](#footnote-652) Two images predominated in these stories: the ‘Oxfam image’ of hopeless dependency, and the ‘Tarzan image’. The latter portrayed Black African people as an intrinsically hostile and animalistic force, located not only outside of history but outside of humanity. The Schools Council attributed this image less to Edgar Rice Burroughs’ original novel than to its reproduction in popular film, ‘television, adventure stories and comics’.

We can trace some of the influences on young people’s racial attitudes through a national survey of children’s reading interests, conducted in 1975 – with the obvious caveat that, as with other forms of knowledge, the attitudes to race present in children’s books would not have been uncritically absorbed. The survey asked readers between the ages of eleven and fifteen to share the titles of books which they had read in the preceding month. Books mentioned more than ten times in completed questionnaires were collated in a table, which reveals the enduring popularity of older imperial classics (including R.M. Ballantyne’s *Coral Island*; Hugh Lofting’s *Doctor Doolittle*; Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book*; H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*; and Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*).[[652]](#footnote-653) Bob Dixon has described the latter as a ‘blue-print’ for empire in fiction and, by extension, the process of colonisation.[[653]](#footnote-654) Its themes of empire as a theatre of masculine self-realisation, at the cost of the lives and dignity of the colonised, were echoed in later iterations of the genre – notably, W.E. Johns’ *Biggles* novels, three of which appeared in the table.

Biggles, Johns’ eponymous protagonist, reasserted imperial masculinity during the era of imperial decline. His exploits were framed within the tradition of the ‘White man’s burden’ – a moral duty to police the globe and to deliver a specifically British form of justice. Biggles ventriloquised anxiety and resentment at the process of decolonisation, presenting this as an expression of moral and political cowardice which left the British vulnerable to exploitation. Thus, in *Biggles and the Black Raider* (1954), Biggles agrees to take a job

on the understanding that there’s no interference by bureaucrats at home. I want no bleating in the House of Commons about a poor innocent native being shot […] Nobody says a word if fifty British tommies are bumped off; but let one poor benighted heathen get the works and the balloon goes up. Then people wonder why things are going to pot.[[654]](#footnote-655)

Biggles’ paranoid fear of a racial power reversal, with which the reader is expected to sympathise, is familiar from contemporary discussions of immigration which depicted the presence of former colonial subjects in the metropole as an oppressive, counter-imperial threat to White Britishness.[[655]](#footnote-656)

For young people at the upper end of the age-range surveyed, a common theme seems to have been the desire for thrill and excitement. The emotional landscape of the imperial adventure story (tales of ‘derring-do’ and the deliverance of justice against the odds, playing out against a harsh foreign landscape) was often transposed onto the Second World War. This was one component of a broader cultural shift in which the war came to occupy the empire’s former space within the national mythos. Popular texts in the genre of war-fiction included Ian Serraillier’s *The Silver Sword*, Paul Brickhill’s *The Dam Busters* and *Reach for the Sky*, and Alistair MacLean’s The *Guns of Navarone* and *Where Eagles Dare*.[[656]](#footnote-657) The popularity of these novels may also be linked to a desire to gain access to otherwise restricted material – including depictions of violence – which were seen as belonging to the adult world.

Certainly, curiosity about sex and violence go some way to accounting for the popularity of the second most widely read book in the 14+ age-group, Richard Allen’s *Skinhead,* which depicts racial violence and sexual assault in gleefully graphic detail.[[657]](#footnote-658) Allen’s work was a vital component of the ‘youth-sploitation’ genre, which spoke specifically to young people’s feelings of social, economic, and political marginalisation. As Bill Osgerby writes, *Skinhead* displayed a profoundly anti-authoritarian streak which acknowledged youth desires for rebellious self-actualisation.[[658]](#footnote-659) Such texts would have been consumed away from, and in defiance of, the gaze of the older generation – symbolised by parental authority.

Nevertheless, there were many other novels on the list which would have been accessed within, and sanctioned by, the family home. Parental attitudes typically form an important component of young people’s racial education.[[659]](#footnote-660) If a parent is respected as an authority figure, then their beliefs will likely be given a special, privileged position in their child’s view of the world. Racism round the kitchen table echoes in the playground. More interestingly, perhaps, there is evidence that young people would use their understanding of age-based hierarchies to back up their own beliefs. The previously cited second-year girls, who protested the multicultural focus of their humanities course, certainly employed this tactic. One of their members, Joyce, expressed her objections in the following terms: ‘my Mum and [indicating her friend Jacky] her mum say they’re brainwashing us...we’re doing too much of it. We should be learning about our own country. There’s more variety in England’.[[660]](#footnote-661) Joyce’s words could be read as a simple expression of faith in her (and Jacky’s) parents’ beliefs. However, her defensive tone implies that she saw herself as upholding a *personal* belief in racial and national superiority by invoking the voices of the group’s mothers – afforded greater power and credence due to their ‘adult’ status. By limiting its vision of education to that which took place within the school system, anti-racist education left the racial/racist education of other spheres (including home and media) uncontested. In 1986, the horrific, racially-motivated murder of Ahmed Iqbal Ullah – at a school which had pioneered multicultural and anti-racist teaching in the Greater Manchester area – drew the effectiveness of these strategies sharply into question.

**Murder in the Playground**

On 17 September 1986 Ahmed Iqbal Ullah, a thirteen-year-old schoolboy of Bangladeshi heritage, was murdered by a (White) fellow pupil in the playground of Burnage High School. Ullah’s murder horrified, but did not necessarily shock, the local Bangladeshi community, for whom racial violence was a constant threat. In Burnage itself, there was a long precedent of physical abuse suffered by South Asian students– in 1982, the son of the Bangladeshi High Commissioner had been hospitalised after an attack by a five-strong gang of White students left him with a fractured cheekbone.[[661]](#footnote-662) For members of the community, there was no doubt that Ullah’s murder was a racially-motivated crime, yet the Greater Manchester Police initially refused to consider it as such. It was in this atmosphere of heightened communal tension that the ‘Macdonald Inquiry into Racism and Racial Violence in Manchester’ was set up by Manchester City Council. The Inquiry’s purpose was to examine the extent to which there was a racial aspect to the circumstances surrounding Ullah’s death, and to the broader problem of violence in Manchester schools. The Inquiry’s ‘Terms of Reference’ also stated its intent to ‘recommend actions intended to eliminate or reduce racial harassment, racial violence and racism in schools’. The Inquiry’s Report, based on the voluntary testimony of 165 witnesses – comprising, amongst others, parents, teachers, and students – was published under the title *Murder in the Playground* in 1989.

*Murder in the Playground* is a devastatingly rich repository of information in race, schooling, and anti-racist education in the Greater Manchester region. It also offers a detailed glimpse of the life of Burnage High School, which existed at the toxic confluence of several educational formats and policy decisions – including comprehensivisation, single-sex education, and anti-racist education. When Dr Gerry Gough took over the headship of Burnage in 1982, he inherited a former grammar school which retained an appreciable number of staff who were committed to the ethos of the tripartite system of education.[[662]](#footnote-663) Evidence given to the Macdonald Inquiry suggested that many teachers felt nostalgia for a ‘golden age’ of English education, in which order, hierarchy, and high academic standards were enforced through corporal punishment. Under this system, it was imagined that ‘indiscipline and racism did not exist’, and all children were given the chance to flourish. Macdonald believed that Burnage’s characteristic violence derived not only from its masculine culture as a boys’ school, but from teachers’ own recourse to physical punishment, which seems to have endured long after its formal abolition.

Macdonald also reported upon a prevailing culture of professional resistance to the anti-racist and multicultural policies instituted by Gough and his allies on the management team. Gough’s reforms were by no means radical; as the Inquiry noted, they consisted primarily of the ‘soft underbelly of multiculturalism’.[[663]](#footnote-664) Indian music, Eid festivals, and multi-faith assemblies gave Burnage the appearance of a school implementing the local authority’s policies on race. Meanwhile, the ‘unofficial’ culture of the school – in the corridors, the playgrounds, and the staffroom – seems to have remained laden with uncontested racism. Staff issued strong objections to the display of ‘pictures of buildings from non-European cultures’ and to notices in languages other than English. One teacher described a general atmosphere of open hostility to work on racism and an unwelcoming attitude to students and their families, over 35 per cent of whom were of Asian or African-Caribbean heritage. Staff routinely dehumanised students by referring to them using racial slurs.

As time went on, it seems that this generalised hostility took a more organised form. Staff members perceived as supportive of multi-cultural and anti-racist policies suffered verbal and physical abuse from their colleagues: one teacher had his face symbolically ‘blacked with shoe polish’ at a party, while staff employed under Section 11 were sent internal hate mail.[[664]](#footnote-665) When the Deputy Head, Peter Moors, attempted to accommodate *halal* dietary requirements by substituting pork for turkey in the school Christmas dinner, he was met with mockery. A group of Middle Management staff displayed their objections by wearing pig badges, and pork scratchings were pinned to the school notice board.

Resistance to anti-racist policy was connected to anxieties surrounding promotion and professional status. Anti-racism was perceived as a doctrine imposed from above, by administrators ‘remote from classroom experience’, who didn’t have to do the ‘dirty work’ in communicating with students.[[665]](#footnote-666) Burnage staff viewed racism itself as a question of individual morality. The common refusal to consider racism a structural problem likely stems from its dehistoricisation: unless situated appropriately as a tool of imperial domination, the systematic conception and enforcement of racial ideology cannot be properly understood. When racism is reduced to a purely personal problem, accusations of racial prejudice will be associated with a damning condemnation of an individual’s moral character, and a concurrent attempt to deny or ignore such accusations. In Burnage High School, this thought process generated a collapse in staff morale and a rejection of anti-racist policies. As one teacher summarised: ‘people were very opposed to initiatives being taken because nobody on the staff wanted to be called a racist. If somebody is called a racist, they take that as being deeply offensive’.

The refusal of many existing staff members to engage with multicultural or anti-racist policy led Dr Gough to turn elsewhere for support: he brought in a number of new teachers deemed sympathetic to the cause, especially through Section 11 funding. The new hires stoked further resentment. On one occasion, a member of staff complained that to get a Scale 4 (senior) teaching position in the school, ‘you had to be a Muslim’.[[666]](#footnote-667) There were evidently fears that the introduction of a teaching apparatus dedicated to anti-racist education, including Section 11 posts, was allowing perceived outsiders to bypass conventional routes to employment and promotion.[[667]](#footnote-668)

The Macdonald Inquiry recognised clear evidence of ‘racial bigotry’ amongst staff members at Burnage High School but refrained from concluding that racism was ‘rampant or widespread’.[[668]](#footnote-669) To consider it as such, they argued, would be ‘a complete distortion of the evidence given to us or our own perceptions of the many teachers whom we met and who gave evidence’. There is a bizarre discrepancy between these pronouncements and the actual contents of the Report, which prove the endemic nature of racism amongst both students and staff. The inconsistency might be accounted for if we suppose that the Inquiry *itself* believed that accusations of racism were equivalent to moral damnation – and was reluctant to apply so severe a judgement to the individuals with whom it had met and worked. A separation of racism from its systemic dimension was certainly present in Macdonald’s description of Burnage’s lack of concern for a group of White students, who had been forced out of school due to their placement on a ‘hit-list’ of racist pupils composed by their South Asian peers in the aftermath of Ullah’s murder, as ‘racist’.[[669]](#footnote-670) Shockingly, given the accounts of racial hostility given above, Macdonald also described the incident as ‘one of the most obvious acts of discrimination we have come across in the course of this Inquiry’.

At times, the Report identified racial violence as a problem specific to poor and working-class communities. It offered an illuminating account of the meeting between Geoff Turner, a local youth worker, and students at Burnage High School in the immediate aftermath of the murder. Turner’s briefing noted that he was going to be working with a group of ‘very racist white youths’.[[670]](#footnote-671) As *Murder in the Playground* uncritically reported, he arrived expecting to ‘meet a group of louts, the thuggish element of society’ and was shocked when he instead encountered ‘an intelligent and neatly dressed group of boys’. This classed language implicitly abetted Turner’s conclusion (shared by the Report) that none of the pupils ‘had any connection with racist organisations’. It should also be noted that the Inquiry here seemed to reduce the threat of racist violence to the *organised* violence of the far-right.

Macdonald’s treatment of staff prejudice and Turner’s encounter with White members of the student-body tally with a broader equivocation on questions of race and racism. The Inquiry concluded that Ullah’s murder by fellow-student Darren Coulburn was not racially motivated – Coulburn had not set out that morning to ‘kill someone of another race against whom he felt prejudice’ – but *was* inextricable from the racist culture in which it occurred.[[671]](#footnote-672) Macdonald described a school environment in which students of South Asian heritage were routinely dehumanised by their classmates – identified more often by racial slurs than by their than by their individual names. Coulburn was a product of this racist culture. So too, was Ullah, who was murdered in the process of defending younger students from bullying. The omnipresent threat of harassment and violence forced older students of colour to protect their more vulnerable peers. This culture was so firmly embedded that many students and teachers ‘did not regard the conduct to which it gives rise as unusual or offensive’. Tellingly, of all the White witnesses who gave evidence to the Inquiry, whether parent or student, only one saw the murder as racist.

The final Report argued that Burnage had a responsibility to accommodate White witnesses’ view of the murder. It heavily implied that competing versions of ‘the truth’ held equal validity and demonstrated reluctance to mediate or judge between the two.[[672]](#footnote-673) Macdonald argued that Burnage’s commitment to presenting Ullah’s murder as a racist event stripped it of its complexity and thereby failed to make ‘the necessary and significant distinction between Darren Coulburn and his white peers’. Throughout the Report, a relativist attitude to the truth was connected to fears of stoking communal tension by offending White sensibilities. In apparent contradiction of the Inquiry’s demands that Ullah’s murder be set within the broader context of systematic racist dehumanisation, Macdonald objected to the school’s ‘view of the murder as racist and as an escalation of racist name calling’, on the grounds that this placed *all* White students ‘more or less in the same camp as Darren Coulburn’. The Report determined that Burnage’s anti-racist policy displayed a fixation with ‘categories and camps’ which served only to alienate White members of the school community from anti-racist work.[[673]](#footnote-674)

*Murder in the Playground* was consistently (and, at times, unfairly) critical of the design and implementation of Burnage High School’s anti-racist policies. Nevertheless, it was very clear that the ‘senseless and counter-productive’ implementation of anti-racist policies in one school must not discredit their use more broadly.[[674]](#footnote-675) This did not stop press commentary which framed the tragedy at Burnage as conclusive evidence of the dangerous failure of anti-racist education. On 25 April 1988, *Manchester Evening News* leaked the Burnage Report’s conclusions. Journalists in the national press quickly homed in on the Inquiry’s criticism of Gough and his anti-racist policies.

The management’s embrace of anti-racism was posited as the *cause* of racial violence in the school. The *Daily Mail* led with headlines including ‘Dream of Harmony Tore this School Apart’, ‘Condemned: Anti-racist Head who Led his School to Disaster’, and ‘This Dangerous Obsession’.[[675]](#footnote-676) The latter proclaimed anti-racism to be a ‘blinkered and self-defeating creed’ tragically endemic to ‘certain Left-dominated education authorities’. The ferocity of these attacks was symbolic of the rise of a powerful ‘New Right’, whose desire to stamp out the values of the so-called ‘loony left’ in English schools would fundamentally shape educational policy under Thatcher – up to and including the introduction of the first ‘National Curriculum’ in 1988. As the Chapter 4 will explore, the New Right’s unabashed attempts to gain cultural hegemony sounded the death knell of the educational experimentation of the previous decades.

# 4. The Conservative Backlash and the National Curriculum, 1979-1995

*There were those who would not admit it – even perhaps some here today – people who would have strenuously denied the suggestion but – in their heart of hearts – they too had their secret fears that it was true: that Britain was no longer the nation that had built an Empire and ruled a quarter of the world. Well they were wrong.[[676]](#footnote-677)* **Margaret Thatcher, 1982.**

**Chapter Summary**

The following chapter encompasses the construction of ideological hegemony by the New Right. It interprets the formulation of the National Curriculum as part of this hegemonic project. I argue that the Education Reform Act and the resulting National Curriculum in History represented a racialised, disciplinary logic. By the mid-1990s, teachers were more likely than ever before to teach the history of non-European countries on their own terms, rather than as extensions of the metropolitan core. However, the space for dissent and challenge within the education system had been dramatically narrowed. The creative autonomy which fed the radical educational experiments of the previous two decades was deliberately and effectively removed.

The New Right was a political and social movement which gathered force from the 1970s onwards. It drew strength from international networks but took a nationally distinctive (and distinctively national) form in the British context. The movement took ideas seriously; it sought nothing less than the construction of a ‘new political language’ and the redefinition of the boundaries of the possible.[[677]](#footnote-678) As such, it can be considered a hegemonic project. As Ruth Levitas has argued, the New Right was not simply an expression of the abrupt ascendancy of a traditional conservative ideology.[[678]](#footnote-679) Novel approaches to state and society were generated, while old ideas were transformed and restructured. A potent ‘ideological synthesis’ married the principles of neoliberalism and ‘authoritarian conservatism’. As we will see, these principles made strange and potentially hostile bedfellows. The conservative stress on historical continuity, and its impulse towards the resurrection of a lost ‘golden age’, sometimes appeared as a cover or justification for the economic and social disjuncture enacted by neoliberalism. However, the New Right was united by ambitious plans to slough off the skin of the post-war ideological consensus and to restore a vanished national glory. History and education were both vitally important to this project.

To quote Stuart Hall, the British New Right ‘won territory without having to win power’.[[679]](#footnote-680) This was particularly true of the educational field. Long before Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative Party was delivered into power by the 1979 general election, the seeds of moral panic over ‘falling standards’ were sown. Comprehensivisation and child centred learning may have been the hallmarks of the preceding decade in education, but they were not without their critics. The *Black Papers,* referenced at the start of Chapter 2,were merely the first volley in a prolonged conservative attack on progressivism.

The debate over educational standards drew on working-class parents’ desire to guarantee a stable future for their children in a competitive job market. Popular experience suggested that comprehensivisation had failed to substantively redress class-based educational disadvantage. The resulting anger opened space for the right to seek to redirect working-class aspiration towards a more traditional education, characterised by ‘programmes of discipline’ and ‘relevance to industrial experience’.[[680]](#footnote-681) When James Callaghan initiated the ‘Great Debate’ on education with his 1976 ‘Ruskin Speech’, he deployed a language of attainment, adaptation to the needs of the marketplace, and ‘standards’ (a word mentioned no fewer than eleven times).[[681]](#footnote-682) His intervention was correctly perceived as evidence of the right’s success in defining the political agenda.[[682]](#footnote-683)

Behind the moral panic over falling standards lay a vision of education as the embattled guarantor of national preservation. As Nancy Murray put it, the school system was believed to be threatened by an extraordinary alliance of ‘enemies within’: ‘permissive parents, feckless teachers reared on 1960s’ pap, outright subversives […] and the pressure groups – black, gay, anti- sexist, peace, ecology - all with a “hidden curriculum” to get their political message across’.[[683]](#footnote-684) The fear of left-wing indoctrination ultimately rested on a denial of children’s subjectivity. Young people were envisaged as blank pages to be stamped with the politics of their educators. To teachers, this often seemed a laughable distortion of their daily realities. As a former teacher turned member of the House of Lords cautioned his fellow politicians: ‘I know how little children really listen to what you are saying. If they do listen but do not agree they are quite happy to say so […] One can become unnecessarily worried about the sensitivities of children over this matter’.[[684]](#footnote-685)

Gill Seidel has pointed to the role of philosophers as champions of the New Right.[[685]](#footnote-686) What is more often ignored is that these thinkers served equally as historians. At times, they were joined by commentators with a background in academic history.[[686]](#footnote-687) The New Right aimed to establish an account of the past which was adequate to their political priorities and to institutionalise this in educational practice. A complex ecosystem of ‘thinktanks’, which made targeted interventions in the public debate, was instrumental to the growth of the New Right’s cultural and ideological hegemony. Groups such as the Campaign for Real Education, the Centre for Policy Studies, the Conservative Philosophy Group, the Salisbury Group, and the Social Affairs Unit, supplied a nucleus around supporters could find community, organise, and publish.[[687]](#footnote-688)

As Robert Phillips has claimed, New Right pressure groups raised the profile of history teaching ‘from the professional to the public domain’.[[688]](#footnote-689) The Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) produced no fewer than ‘seventeen publications on education, five dealing exclusively or predominantly with history’, over the course of the 1980s. The latter typically attacked the ‘new history’: a mode of historical study supposedly characterised by cultural relativism and an overemphasis on ‘skills’ and ‘concepts’ at the expense of knowledge and narrative. The ‘skills *versus* content’ debate was very much a fabrication of the New Right. Although there was some genuine feeling amongst teachers that the emphasis on abstract skills, divorced from chronological knowledge, may have gone too far, even the most fervent of SCHP’s supporters cannot be claimed to have truly abandoned a fact-based approach.[[689]](#footnote-690) As we will see, complaints of the decline in knowledge and narrative-based learning seem to have stood in for broader cultural anxieties about the state of the nation.

Throughout the 1980s, a popular sense of national decline was accompanied by a quest to recover the past glories of empire – a tendency which was expressed in the Falklands War of 1982. Following the short-lived conflict, the imperial spirit redirected inwards. As Stuart Hall argued, ‘an imperial metropolis cannot pretend its history has not occurred’.[[690]](#footnote-691) The defence of empire manifested in attacks on various attempts by London councils (often designated ‘loony left’) to replace street names which connoted imperial subjugation. Thus, the *Daily Mail* initiated a press storm against Lambeth Council’s proposal to rename ‘Rhodesia Road’ as ‘Zimbabwe Road’.[[691]](#footnote-692) In September 1985, a number of tabloid dailies ran the falsified story that Hackney Council was considering changing the name of Britannia Walk to ‘Shaheed-E-Azam Bhagot Singh [sic.] Avenue’.[[692]](#footnote-693) The headline ‘Britannia no longer rules the waves in a left-wing council borough’ was indicative of the general tone of imperial nostalgia. As Murray commented, ‘any attempt to look at British history, culture and institutions from the black perspective has brought the press on to the offensive, exonerating British society from imputations of racism’, and reaffirming British values and the national ‘way of life’.[[693]](#footnote-694)

**The New Right on the Attack**

The two currents of conservative backlash – nostalgic historical revival and anti-progressivism – ran together in schools. An early CPS pamphlet, Hugh Thomas’ *History, Capitalism and Freedom* (1979), featured an introduction penned by Thatcher. The soon-to-be Prime Minister despaired that the past was now being judged by the standards of the present, leading to the denigration of Britain’s historic achievements (probably a reference to empire).[[694]](#footnote-695) Both Thomas and Thatcher called for the restoration of ‘strong and powerful visions of the past’ capable of animating the national spirit. This was typical of the political commentary of the New Right, which asserted the primacy of national cultural distinctiveness in education. Put simply, ‘teachers in Britain have a duty to transmit British culture’.[[695]](#footnote-696) This pertained especially to the communication of history. For the influential conservative philosopher Roger Scruton, national history was the ‘thread which joins such nations to their culture and identity’.[[696]](#footnote-697) Failure to teach the national story would cut children off from their roots, compromising the moral and political health of the nation and casting doubt on its future. This conception relied upon a reifying vision of national culture, and of history, which rendered it fixed and immutable. Continuity was the watchword of the New Right’s historical sensibility. Scruton spoke of a mystified ‘historical sense’ delivered by understanding a society’s contemporary ‘social and spiritual condition’.[[697]](#footnote-698) Understanding the national past was contingent upon one’s membership of the national community in the present: the spirit which animated history was intelligible to today’s citizens as a mirror of their own reality. John Casey, Scruton’s mentor and co-founder of the Conservative Philosophy Group, was more specific. National distinctiveness resided in a ‘continuity of institutions’, the British people’s ‘immemorial acceptance’ of authority, and their loyalty to the state.[[698]](#footnote-699)

For Casey and for Scruton, questions of content and interpretation were indivisible. The ‘transmission of culture’ was allied to the pursuit of knowledge.[[699]](#footnote-700) A chronological, sequential account of British political history would demonstrate the animating force of the national spirit and engender feelings of patriotism and kinship in the young. Advocates of the ‘new history’ and of multiculturalism were accused of a ‘specious relativism’ which starved the past of its meaning and coherence.[[700]](#footnote-701) To decentre British nationhood was to deprive history of its organising narrative and to throw the country’s very survival into question. According to conservative commentator Simon Pearce, the multicultural approach embraced by the Swann Report constituted a ‘dramatic break in the continuity of our national life’.[[701]](#footnote-702) If continuity was the hallmark of the national character, then it stood to reason that breaks in continuity – including breaks in the continuity of historiographical interpretation – were in some sense anti-national. The New Right reflected bitterly on the decline of a ‘golden age’ of history teaching, in which the role of the teacher was simply to introduce pupils to the ‘reality and certainty of the past as it existed’.[[702]](#footnote-703) History, in this interpretation, was a fixed, testable body of knowledge, comprising incontrovertible, morally significant truths. The desire for a past – *and for a historical praxis* – imagined as fundamentally stable and assured, spoke to a fear of the uncertainties and insecurities of the present.

The New Right sought to return empire to the heart of the national story. Stuart Deuchar, a some-time teacher associated with the Campaign for Real Education and the CPS, described the ‘new history’ as a manifestation of the nation’s ‘post-colonial neuroses’.[[703]](#footnote-704) Anti-colonial histories attracted hostile attention from the New Right, as illustrated by the outcry over a children’s educational series produced by the IRR. It was book three (entitled *How Racism Came to Britain*) around which a political firestorm eventually broke, generating dozens of critiques and a Channel 4 special.[[704]](#footnote-705) *How Racism Came to Britain* offered a series of cartoons which situated contemporary British racism in its historical context, exploring the imperative of racial ideology as justification for imperial expansion. Politicians, journalists, and polemicists were perhaps attracted by the book’s cartoon format, which they argued was emblematic of its supposed caricature of the national story.[[705]](#footnote-706)

The storm announced itself on 25 July 1985, when *Times* columnist Ronald Butt issued a diatribe against ‘a book of great wickedness, perverting history’.[[706]](#footnote-707) He was particularly incensed by the IRR’s apparent failure to credit British imperial achievement: the abolition of the slave trade, women’s freedom (represented by the abolition of *sati*), and the triumphs of ‘law-giving, administration and medicine’. Butt’s ‘balance sheet’ understanding of history, in which wrongs were negated and justified by rights, had a rich liberal imperialist heritage. So, too, did the specific examples cited: in particular, the portrayal of women of colour as victims of the supposedly unique predations of downwardly racialised men, and the instrumentalisation of their bodies as a rationale for White intervention.[[707]](#footnote-708)

The IRR and its educational work were the focus of several chapters in *Anti-Racism: An Assault on Education and Value* – an edited collection which brought together some of the key voices of the New Right. Four authors in the collection – John Marks, Tom Hastie, David Dale, and Simon Pearce – registered anger at new teaching materials which failed to credit the British people with the abolition of the slave trade. Pearce noted that the ‘successful agitation against the trade in Britain’ should be featured as a balancing corrective to accounts of colonial exploitation.[[708]](#footnote-709) Abolitionism, narrated as the triumph of justice by means of legislative reform, was portrayed as the logical extension of the national character – defined by respect for the law, fair-play, and institutional continuity. The characteristics to which Britishness was reduced could only be supported by a patrician view of empire. Thus, benevolent imperialism was reaffirmed as the key to national self-understanding.

The furore over *How Racism Came to Britain* was not an isolated incident. From the mid-1970s onwards, press campaigns against educational materials were launched with stunning regularity. The 1985 dispute was foreshadowed by attacks on Basil Davidson’s secondary school textbook, *Discovering Africa’s Past,* which was published in 1978. On 2 April, *The Sunday Express* published an invective against Davidson’s work, which focused particularly on his portrayal of the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya. The *Express* decried its representation as a liberation struggle and not as a ‘terror campaign’ against White settlers.[[709]](#footnote-710) Here, an understanding of empire as a benevolent enterprise foreclosed the understanding of violent anti-colonial resistance as a legitimate political force. *Discovering Africa’s Past* was also condemned for its alleged lack of balance. The *Express* demanded that Britain’s role in ‘helping the [African] continent’, as symbolised by the work of David Livingstone, be recorded alongside its involvement in the transatlantic slave trade.

These accusations attracted governmental attention. By mid-April, Lord Donaldson of Kingsbridge, a life peer in the House of Lords and Minister of State for DES, had cautioned LEAs that Davidson’s work was just ‘one side, and a somewhat biased side, of the story’, in the interest of promoting balance and objectivity.[[710]](#footnote-711) In commending Donaldson’s actions, Lord Orr-Ewing asked a revealing question: ‘Is it not true that thousands of British colonial servants have helped educate, train and prepare African people for self-government, and that that side of the story should be better known to everyone in this country?’[[711]](#footnote-712) Orr-Ewing envisioned imperialism as a form of paternalistic trusteeship in which the father of democracy (Britain) bestowed its knowledge upon grateful children. Hence, forms of politics which diverged from a democratic, legislative process modelled on the British Parliamentary system were interpreted as an ungrateful and illegitimate rejection of colonial tutelage. States which broke from this tradition, often in the very moment of seizing independence, were deemed unworthy of self-governance.

Davidson’s defenders took two approaches. Some sought to refute accusations of bias. Thus, Baroness Gaitskell described Davidson’s judgement on colonialism as ‘completely impartial’.[[712]](#footnote-713) Others accepted that Davidson’s was a biased perspective – but noted that this was a universal characteristic of historical writing. Ginny Waters, an editor who had helped to prepare the book for publication, acknowledged that the book was ‘slanted’ but denied any need for the book to tell ‘the other side of the story’: ‘I think he [Davidson] felt that there had been plenty of criticism published about Africa and he did not want to touch on that’.[[713]](#footnote-714) In Waters’ view, *Discovering Africa’s Past* was no more biased than any other work of history, and in fact was designed to balance out a historiographical tradition of colonial exculpation. Of course, such claims still accepted ‘balance’ as a necessary and desirable characteristic of good history and of good teaching – a concession, in this context, to the ideology of liberal imperialism.

In February 1986, the Association of Conservative Peers used a rare opportunity to set the subject for debate in the House of Lords to condemn the ‘politicisation’ of education.[[714]](#footnote-715) Some members of the Association sought the renewal of governmental guidance on questions of bias and the teaching of ‘controversial’ subjects. Others wanted a guarantee that ‘politically contentious subjects should form no part of the curriculum of children below the age of 16’. What united advocates of the Motion was a sense that the national ‘cultural heritage’ – ‘our traditional beliefs and values and our democratic freedoms’ – were under threat. As Lord Jenkins of Putney pointed out, the Motion identified ‘politicisation’ as ‘something which takes place when the constitution is criticised’ but ‘does not occur if the established order is merely explained or defended’.[[715]](#footnote-716) The discourse of ‘politicisation’ posited national ‘cultural heritage’ as natural, normative, and free from political or ideological content.

It would be a mistake to read this as a mere rhetorical manoeuvre, born out of cynical hypocrisy. Instead, the terms of the Lords Debate hinted at the New Right’s genuine belief in the ‘universalism’ of cultural forms variously expressed as English or European.[[716]](#footnote-717) In this, they were influenced by a classically colonial belief in civilisational superiority, and by a proselytising vision of Christianity as an expression of fundamental moral truth.[[717]](#footnote-718) The New Right’s assumption of the normativity of their values manifested in a language of ‘commonsense’ politics. Stuart Hall has described how the image of the ‘ordinary citizen, threatened by the depredations of “extremists”’, was deployed in order to manufacture consent for the Thatcherite expansion of the law-and-order society.[[718]](#footnote-719) A similar binary, which placed left-wing and progressive views in opposition to self-evident, universal truths, functioned in the educational sphere.

**‘Commonsense’ Politics and Freedom of Speech**

In 1984, the Headmaster of Bradford’s Drummond Middle School, Ray Honeyford, published an article (‘Education and Race – An Alternative View’) in one of the premier organs of the New Right, *The* *Salisbury Review.* As a teacher in a school in which 95 per cent of students were drawn from racially minoritised backgrounds (of whom the majority were of Pakistani heritage), Honeyford complained that he was the recipient of ‘vehement criticism’ whenever he questioned the ‘current educational orthodoxies connected with race’:

It is very difficult to write honestly and openly of my experiences, and the reflections they evoke, since the race relations lobby is extremely powerful in the state education service. The propaganda generated by multi-racial zealots is now augmented by a growing bureaucracy of race in local authorities. And this makes freedom of speech difficult to maintain. By exploiting the enormous tolerance traditional in this country, the race lobby has so managed to induce and maintain feelings of guilt in the well-disposed majority, that decent people are not only afraid of voicing certain thoughts, they are uncertain even of their right to think those thoughts.[[719]](#footnote-720)

Lurking here, as in much of Honeyford’s work, was the ghost of empire. He believed that the ‘race relations lobby’ had exploited the goodwill of the British people in order to induce a crushing post-colonial guilt. To restore national self-respect, Honeyford argued, ‘sensible, civilised people’, must forget their remorse for what their ‘forebears did in the name of Empire’.[[720]](#footnote-721) Implicit within this statement was a denial of the continuing power of imperial structures within present-day Britain.

Honeyford’s article resulted in a catastrophic collapse of trust within the school and its wider community. When Honeyford was suspended by the Bradford LEA, his case became a *cause célèbre* in the national press. Honeyford fought (and ultimately won) a court case against his dismissal at the on the basis of freedom of speech – a framing which was enthusiastically taken up by journalists who lionised the teacher as a stalwart defender of British liberties. By 1985, the press campaign of support had raised Honeyford’s profile so successfully that he was voted the fourth most popular man in Britian in a poll by BBC Radio Four’s *Today*.[[721]](#footnote-722)

Amongst the most spirited defenders of the principle of freedom of speech and its role in defining British nationhood were those who had called for the suppression of the IRR’s teaching materials on imperial history.[[722]](#footnote-723) Likewise, Antony Flew, a prolific New Right commentator, simultaneously accused antiracist educators of censorship and demanded that the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) ‘be directed on pain of dissolution to formulate its own redefinition’.[[723]](#footnote-724) Once again, this should not be interpreted as cynical hypocrisy. As David Oldman has argued, the moralising empiricism of the New Right’s philosophy – which entailed ‘an appeal to “what everyone knows” in a language that “everyone can understand”’ – gave them absolute faith in the ‘truth of their factual assertions’.[[724]](#footnote-725) Opponents of multicultural and anti-racist education ventriloquised the voices of an imagined community of ‘ordinary’, ‘fundamentally decent people’ whose opinions and experiences took on the cast of fundamental truths.[[725]](#footnote-726) Ideas which fell outside the boundaries of ‘commonsense’ politics were not conceptualised as mere differences in opinion, but as immoral lies. As such, they were excluded from the protection of freedom of speech.

The image of the man-on-the-street – the bearer of commonsense, practical wisdom – sometimes placed class in opposition to, and in conflict with, race. As a strategy of divide and rule, this may be considered an antecedent to today’s invocation of the White Working Class, which performs a similar ideological function in excluding downwardly racialised people from the political authority contained within the concept of the ‘salt of the earth’.[[726]](#footnote-727) In the 1980s, in keeping with neo-liberalism’s fear of organised working-class politics and its celebration of the meritocracy of the market, an explicit language of class was deliberately skirted. The ordinary, ‘fundamentally decent’ citizen was represented through the invocation of symbols of working-class life, or by reference to biographies illustrative of social mobility from a deprived past. The press outcry over Hackney Council’s purported attempt to rename Britannia Walk positioned ‘local Cockneys’, ‘likely to be OUTNUMBERED by immigrants within 10 years’, as the embattled defenders of a demotic, national common sense against foreign subversion.[[727]](#footnote-728)

In Dewsbury, White parents’ refusal to send their children to a school drawing most of its pupils from the town’s Asian and Muslim communities became another of the New Right’s chosen talking points. Eric Haley, a 53-year-old publican, rapidly assumed the role of spokesperson for the parents. His public persona played to the media desire for authenticity with considerable success. Fred Naylor, Secretary of the Parental Alliance for Choice in Education (PACE) and educational adviser to the Dewsbury parents, described Haley as a ‘blunt Yorkshireman’ with exceptional ‘entrepreneurial qualities’ (he had held the jobs of builder, wholesale jeweller, and publican in quick succession).[[728]](#footnote-729) In Naylor’s account, Haley became a sort of everyman hero charged with safeguarding national values; the preservation of freedom in England ‘depended on men like Eric’. The safety of the collective was underwritten by rugged individualism. The media’s narration of Ray Honeyford’s personal history invariably hit the same notes: born into a poor, working-class Mancunian family, Honeyford had qualified as a teacher via night classes, tenaciously climbing the social ladder.[[729]](#footnote-730) Indeed, it is likely that his background was what made Honeyford a worthy and appealing champion for journalists and readers alike.

Unsurprisingly, the opposition of class and race was extremely prominent in the writings of the self-proclaimed socialist, former History teacher, and ILEA official Tom Hastie.[[730]](#footnote-731) Hastie was thrown into alliance with the New Right precisely *because of* his belief in the centrality of class as a force of historical change. He argued that the real winner of the capitalist system was a multi-racial, transnational, capitalist class – not in itself an especially controversial statement. However, this argument was developed in a manner which placed class and race in competition with one other. According to Hastie, the only social group to hold a ‘monopoly’ on hardship and exploitation was ‘the poor – whatever their colour’; class ‘transcended race’ as a structure of oppression.

Hastie’s historical sensibility might justly be described as vulgar Marxist – there is a persistent sense in his writing that historians’ embrace of race as an analytical category had unsettled and frustrated his reduction of past to a chronicle of class struggle. This might help to explain Hastie’s bizarre assumption of a historical ‘zero-sum game’, in which attention to race necessarily detracted from – rather than informed – understandings of class politics. The prominence of his voice in the defence of educational nationalism is a useful reminder that New Right conservatism should not be treated as coterminous with Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative Party. In fact, the New Right’s invocation of the silently classed everyman as a buttress against the ‘manipulations’ of multicultural and antiracist education may well have appealed to those seeking a new language for class-based politics in the 1980s.[[731]](#footnote-732)

Hastie’s assertion of the primacy of class as a structure of oppression rested on a denial of the systematic dimension of racism. As Hastie put it, ‘there are crazy people in every community, whatever its colour’, who must not be taken as representative of its wider dynamics.[[732]](#footnote-733) This was symptomatic of what contemporaries labelled the ‘New Racism’ – a doctrine which posited hostility to difference as a natural, inevitable, and hence dehistoricised part of the human experience.[[733]](#footnote-734) Within this framework, racism had three principal sources: the personal moral failings of a small minority of White people, immigration itself, and the cultural and social deficiencies of immigrants and/or people of colour.

Honeyford distinguished between ‘prejudice’ – the product of a universal ‘preference for one’s own kind’ – and ‘discrimination’, which he described as an attempt to enforce ‘a preference *for* as an hostility *against* [emphasis added]*’*.[[734]](#footnote-735) He concluded that most people in Britain, regardless of racial identity, were ‘prejudiced non-discriminators’. Prejudice could be counteracted by simple human interactions across the boundaries of race, although this was contingent upon ‘newcomers’’ willingness to assimilate to British cultural norms. Only a small minority of Britons, situated far beyond the social pale, were committed ‘discriminators’ – a curious and regrettable condition of which there was no clear origin, nor any proposed remedy.

To deny the systematic nature of racial discrimination in the UK, it was first necessary to distort or to erase its imperial parentage. Thus, Hastie authored the following polemic on the writing of colonial history:

As a lifelong Socialist who has taught Commonwealth history at “A” level, I am no stranger to the evils of imperialism, but *I am also aware that those evils were made possible by men who were imperialists rather than by those who just happened to be white* […] Colour or race was quite incidental in the development of capitalism and its ultimate form, imperialism*.* Is the [IRR] prepared to insist that had black societies enjoyed these same historical advantages of Western Europe then they would not have exploited them and their fellow human beings in a capitalist and imperialist manner? To claim that they would not have done so seems to attribute to blacks the qualities of a moral *Herrenvolk* [emphasis added].[[735]](#footnote-736)

In his hurry to exculpate White people from moral accountability for the evils of slavery, Hastie failed to recognise racial categories as the productof, and justification for, imperial subjugation. This approach had the effect of dehistoricising race and racism and portraying them as purely incidental to any account of the imperial past. Once again, despite Hastie’s repeated identification with a socialist philosophy, his writings were imbued with a conservative mindset which accepted exploitation as the natural order of the world. Imperialism was the product of humankind’s essentially oppressive nature. By geographical accident, White people had simply been better placed to indulge this nature and claim the resulting spoils.

By denying systematic racism, the New Right was able to portray resistance to racial discrimination as morally equivalent to racism itself. Hastie chose to draw provocative parallels between the Nazi Party and advocates of anti-racist policy, due to their shared preoccupation with race.[[736]](#footnote-737) Others explored the same theme with greater subtlety, especially in the aftermath of the 1981 urban rebellions. Nancy Murray has drawn attention to the work of conservative commentator Ronald Butt, who attributed the ‘burning of Brixton’ to the influence of ani-racist educators in peddling ‘black hatred of white society’.[[737]](#footnote-738) Systematic racial discrimination in education, employment, and housing (amongst other fields) was conveniently erased as a source of anger and resistance. Similarly, Honeyford inveighed against the creation of ‘unnecessary chips on young black shoulders’.[[738]](#footnote-739) Anti-racist education was blamed for drawing attention to racial divides, which would then inevitably overspill into physical violence.

**Conservative Cultures and Classroom Impact**

Multicultural and antiracist initiatives, along with critical approaches to the British empire, were targeted by an increasingly hostile environment as the 1980s progressed. Nevertheless, radical experimentation continued to flourish. From the standpoint of the 1990s, the historian and educator Julia Bush looked back upon the preceding decade with positive nostalgia:

“Multicultural education” was still fashionable. The Swann Report had spoken. The Greater London Council was not yet dead. Section 11 money flowed. We were supposed to be multiculturally educating all children (even adults?); and that included the “all-white dimension” in the rural shires of innermost England.[[739]](#footnote-740)

Bush’s portrayal of the 1980s as a halcyon age of educational experimentation was coloured by later events – specifically, the arrival of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams and the advent of the National Curriculum – which figured as major turning points in English educational history (and English historical education). The introduction of the National Curriculum was a seminal moment precisely because it represented an unprecedented centralisation of the education system. Prior to this, teachers’ professional autonomy remained relatively intact, and advocates of ‘progressive’ education were able to continue along much the same path, regardless of the desires and demands of the government of the day. This is not, however, to say that the changing political climate left no mark on schools beyond the eventual imprint of legislative change.

A culture of imperial rehabilitation made itself felt in some classrooms. In 1980, Andrew Reekes, a teacher at Tonbridge School, planned a short programme of study for a group of fourteen-year-old, non-examination-track students.[[740]](#footnote-741) The course, like so many examined in the previous chapter, drew on the principles of participatory learning. Pupils were to be treated as historians in their own right and given the tools to examine their surroundings. Reekes’ students analysed the Tonbridge School Registers, ‘a sort of Who’s Who of nineteenth-century old boys’, through which it was discovered that a substantial portion had gone on to work in the colonies. Reekes was determined to explore these colonial biographies in more detail and devoted the summer term to an ambitious oral history project. A call for interviewees received an enthusiastic local response. Each student was assigned a subject who had personally participated in the colonial governance of India, whether as a soldier, a civil servant, a policeman, a missionary, or a ‘Memsahib’.

Reekes envisioned his project as a form of restitution for marginalised histories, and as a corrective to the process of imperial forgetting which had been institutionalised in the British school system. Readers might again be tempted to draw parallels with the forms of historical education studied in the previous chapter, but Reekes mourned the erasure of the imperial past for a different reason. He envisaged the course as a challenge to the present generation of educators, for whom empire had become a ‘dirty word and colonialism a matter purely for apology’.[[741]](#footnote-742) According to Reekes’, his was a generation which had been privileged to grow up surrounded by the ‘artifacts of the Imperial adventure’ (such as ‘faded sepia tints of grandparents looking terribly English in exotic climes’). He regretted that knowledge of the imperial legacy had been denied to students born into an ‘insular Britain of lowered horizons’. The goal of the course was, then, to recapture some sense of lost national glory.

Reekes drew inspiration from the success of the 1974 BBC radio series *Plain Tales from the Raj* and the associated book, both of which comprised the historian Charles Allen’s oral history interviews with the final generation of British colonial administrators.[[742]](#footnote-743) Elizabeth Buettner has described the dissemination of Allen’sworkas a seminal moment in the recollection of empire, in which the memories of repatriated ‘empire families’ were transferred to ‘wider publics’.[[743]](#footnote-744) She argues that ‘empire families’ were engaged in a self-conscious, deeply personal process of imperial rehabilitation which culminated in the ‘Raj nostalgia’ of the 1980s. A self-justificatory narrative in which violence and resistance were subsumed by ‘stories of affection and gratitude’ manifested in a host of popular cultural representations of the Raj, including *Heat and Dust* (1983), and *Far Pavilions*, *A Passage to India*, *Kim*, and *The Jewel in the Crown* (all 1984).[[744]](#footnote-745)

Tonbridge pupils were reported to experience a mixture of enthusiasm and possessiveness towards ‘their own individual Raj representatives’.[[745]](#footnote-746) The intimate personal connection between interviewer and interviewee was symbolised by some students’ decision to take on a voluntary role as social worker to their subjects. The bridging of generational gaps, identification with interviewees, and the internalisation of their views were built into the project. There was an analytical element to the work – pupils were invited to situate the life-stories they were recording within their existing framework of knowledge, and a few commented on the distinctly ‘Victorian’ pattern of life reported by their subjects. However, critical evaluation of the source material seems to have been neglected in the pursuit of the excitement of the ‘exotic’. The interviews were understood as a window through which an authentic historical truth could be glimpsed. Hence, they became an end in themselves, rather than the means to an end. The project’s conclusions were ultimately those delivered by its subjects – ‘a belief that the job was worth doing and that the British did it rather well’. Tellingly, of the many oral history projects then practised in English secondary schools, this is one of the few deemed valuable enough to be preserved as anything more than personal ephemera: the Cambridge School of South Asian Studies expressed an interest in archiving the tapes.[[746]](#footnote-747) The narrative of imperial ‘justice and “fair play”’ seems to have been amenable to those who filled the semi-official role of custodians of the past.

London’s India Office Library and Records (IOLR) had long been the country’s premier repository for information on the colonial experience in India. In the 1980s, the vogue for ‘Raj nostalgia’ and source-based, investigative learning led to increased demands on its services by youth audiences.[[747]](#footnote-748) The historian and archivist S.R. Ashton described how Richard Attenborough’s cinematic biography of Gandhi had ‘generated a veritable flood of letters’ from school pupils. So many enquiries were in fact received that IOLR decided to compile a ‘selection of “Gandhi” documents’ targeted at school students. These learning materials covered biographical elements, alongside explorations of Gandhian political thought and its reception. Reekes’ project should be treated as part of this broader cultural turn.

In 1982, around the time the IOLR was absorbed into the British Library, it instituted a dedicated Education Service.[[748]](#footnote-749) The Service was a direct response to a request from Derek Merrill, an Advisory Teacher based in Ealing, who sought assistance in the development of teaching materials on modern South Asian history. Their collaboration produced a pack of primary sources on the Amritsar Massacre, to be distributed across the Borough. As the IOLR reported, the Amritsar Massacre had long been amongst the most popular subjects of inquiry from teachers, students, and LEAs. It attributed this enthusiasm to the relevant source materials, ‘based principally on the reports of two Committees of Enquiry – one British and one Indian’, which were concise, teachable, and of interest for the questions they raised around historical methodology (e.g. the evaluation of conflicting accounts).

The Amritsar Massacre had one other essential characteristic which accounted for its popularity amongst teachers – the ease with which it lent itself to ‘balance sheet’ modes of historical understanding. The glimpse which Reekes provided into his own classroom shows that, for the boys of Tonbridge School, teaching on the Amritsar Massacre was transformed into a lesson in ‘crowd control’, guided by the ‘question of whether Brigadier-General Dyer should have fired on the dissident groups’.[[749]](#footnote-750) Pupils seem to have been expected to debate the pros and cons of the massacre – a practice in keeping with a broader, liberal imperialist vision of history in which the ‘positives’ and ‘negatives’ of empire were weighed against each other as a means of exculpation and redemption.

Reekes believed that the massacre represented the ‘most frightful example of military ruthlessness towards unarmed civilians’ in the history of the British empire.[[750]](#footnote-751) This hints at another possible reason for the popularity of teaching on Jallianwala Bagh: it permitted colonial violence to be understood as exceptional, rather than as part of the fabric of empire. In 1987, Merrill co-authored a textbook based on his work with the IOLR, *Amritsar 1919*, which met with a scathing review from Tom Hastie.[[751]](#footnote-752) Hastie took umbrage with the text’s claim that a majority of English people had defended Dyer’s decision to fire on the crowd. Merrill and his collaborators do seem to have underestimated the degree to which British public opinion was divided on the massacre.[[752]](#footnote-753) However, it would be difficult to agree with Hastie’s conclusion that Amritsar was the consequence of ‘one man’s mental instability and incompetence (for which he was sacked)’ and was ‘certainly not typical of the British Raj’.[[753]](#footnote-754)

As Satia argues, the presentation of atrocities as the exceptional products of a few ‘bad apples’ amongst the governing elite functioned as part of the liberal imperialist ‘balance sheet’ interpretation.[[754]](#footnote-755) The public trials of Warren Hastings, the Governor-General of Bengal, and Edward John Eyre, Governor of Jamaica, exculpated the imperial system by shifting the blame onto its representatives. The condemnation of individuals in fact provided new justification for imperial rule. Corruption would be redeemed by the march of historical progress – a process of cathartic ‘moral recuperation’ in which British stewardship was to play an intrinsic, corrective role. Thus, Winston Churchill could claim that the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh was ‘without pre­ce­dent or parallel’ in the history of the empire and retain an unshaken imperial pride.[[755]](#footnote-756)

**Legislative Change: The Formulation of the National Curriculum**

The 1986 introduction of the GCSE demonstrated a centralising impulse within Conservative educational policy. GCSEs replaced the bipartite examination system of CSEs and O Levels with a common approach encompassing students with a wide range of perceived abilities. The National Criteria for History, published in 1985, laid out standardised assessment objectives for the new exams. For the first time, candidates across the nation would be judged against a common framework. However, the Criteria were reluctant to prescribe a universally applicable, minimum core of content. For example, each exam board was obliged to offer at least one syllabus in British History, but no school was required to *choose* this option. In practice, three syllabuses seem to have predominated: the Schools History Project (as the SCHP had been renamed after the abolition of the Schools Council in 1984), British economic and social history (from c.1750), and modern world history.[[756]](#footnote-757)

The National Criteria drew heavily upon the innovations of the SCHP, most notably in the priority it gave to ‘evidence-based skills’ such as historical empathy.[[757]](#footnote-758) For members of the New Right commentariat, this represented a dangerous concession to the hated ‘new history’.[[758]](#footnote-759) When Anthony Freeman and Chris McGovern, teachers at Lewes Priory Comprehensive School, publicly objected to a trial exam paper put out by the Southern Board, their fight became a *cause célèbre*. Freeman and McGovern raised concerns that the level of questioning was insufficiently rigorous for the target age group and would negatively impact students’ transition to A Level.[[759]](#footnote-760) Their most fundamental critique, however, focused on the issue of empathy.

McGovern reacted especially strongly to a question which he alleged asked children to ‘imagine that they were Palestinian terrorists and to explain why they blew up an Israeli passenger plane’.[[760]](#footnote-761) Students were expected to show ‘differentiated historical empathy’ (the ability to demonstrate understanding of the motives of historical actors with differing perspectives). In this instance, therefore, students would have to explain the point of view of the bomber alongside the ‘point of view of the people you were blowing up’. In McGovern’s eyes, such exercises were intellectually bankrupt and politically dangerous. At best, students would be engaged in a meaningless expression of platitudes. At worst, they were being invited to identify with the aims and strategies of political violence. Freeman and McGovern ultimately decided to enter students into the Scottish O Level, alongside the new GCSE course – a decision which may have cost both men their jobs.[[761]](#footnote-762)

The historian Robert Skidelsky, who happened to have a child at Lewes Priory, amplified these critiques.[[762]](#footnote-763) Skidelsky’s political biography bears some similarity to that of Tom Hastie, in that his embrace of New Right conservatism did not (initially) map onto a Conservative political affiliation. Skidelsky flirted successively with both the Labour Party and the Social Democratic Party, before joining the Conservatives in the early 1990s.[[763]](#footnote-764) He seems to have been brought into the complex New Right eco-system by way of overriding cultural concerns, rather than existing political commitment. Skidelsky believed that the Criteria represented a missed opportunity to instruct young people in (distinctively national) shared values, and to impart the moral and political lessons of the national past.[[764]](#footnote-765) As such, he called for a centrally mandated, national history curriculum which would specify a minimum core of compulsory content.

The Conservative government had reached a similar conclusion. The Party’s 1987 General Election Manifesto promised to deliver a ‘National Curriculum’ in all British state schools.[[765]](#footnote-766) In this, the two core strands of Thatcherite ideology, neo-liberalism and neo-conservative social authoritarianism, were – at least at first – united in common cause. The pledge was couched in a familiar language of educational standards and parental choice. A National Core Curriculum would ensure that all pupils aged five to sixteen studied a ‘basic range of subjects’.[[766]](#footnote-767) Each subject would be governed by a nationally applicable syllabus, to guarantee quality, continuity, and measurability of education. Standardised ‘attainment levels’ and regular testing would allow the progress of pupils to be quantified and compared, giving parents the knowledge to make informed decisions regarding their children’s education. Curricular changes were to be accompanied by new rules requiring schools to enrol children up to their physical capacity, rather than ‘artificially’ capping student numbers. This would, it was hoped, enable parents to ‘vote with their feet’ when choosing a school. The market-led logic of Thatcher’s Brave New World was to enter education in force.

More subtly, the National Curriculum was intended to guarantee the discipline and moral health of British youth. The proposals would curb teacher autonomy and give schools the opportunity to opt out of management by local LEA and run themselves.[[767]](#footnote-768) In so doing, Thatcher hoped to undermine two perceived strongholds of the ‘loony left’: local authorities and teachers. Keith Joseph, who held the role of Secretary of State for Education and Science from 1981 to May 1986, labelled LEAs as the ‘self-appointed apostles of anti-racism’.[[768]](#footnote-769)  Joseph perceived anti-racist policies as expressions of ‘self-indulgent bias’. Kenneth Baker, who held the role from May 1986 to July 1989, reprised the invective against ‘the flourishing of anti-family, anti-police, and anti-competitive values’ in schools under the control of Labour-led, primarily urban LEAs.[[769]](#footnote-770)

The threat of a generation poisoned by ‘mediocrity and indoctrination’ moved the government to effect an unprecedented centralisation of educational power.[[770]](#footnote-771) The result – the Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988 – was a dramatic and wide-ranging piece of legislation which did away with many aspects of the educational settlement reached in the Butler Act of 1944. Its chief innovation was the National Curriculum, which took different forms in England and Wales. References to the National Curriculum below will refer exclusively to the English context, unless otherwise specified.

Under the terms set by the 1988 Act, the National Curriculum was divided into four sets of objectives for educational attainment, designated as Key Stages (KS).[[771]](#footnote-772) KS1 and KS2 encompassed primary education, while KS3 (eleven to fourteen years) and KS4 (fourteen to sixteen) comprised the secondary level. The Curriculum distinguished between Core subjects (maths, English, and science) and Foundation subjects (history, geography, technology, music, art and physical education). Subject-specific curricula were to be determined by Working Groups, appointed at the discretion of the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State was also responsible for setting ‘Terms of Reference’ to guide their deliberations. In the case of History, the Working Group was first mandated to produce an Interim Report (published in August 1989) offering initial recommendations on content and assessment. This was to be followed by a public consultation which would inform a revised Final Report (released on 3 April 1990).

The changes implemented by the ERA went far beyond curricular design. Thatcher began her attack on the regional powerbases of the left with the abolition of seven Labour-led metropolitan councils (effective from 1 April 1986) and the imposition of ‘rate-capping’ on council spending. ERA continued this project by introducing a new category of ‘Grant Maintained Schools’, which enabled schools to opt out of local authority control and be funded by central government. About a quarter of all state schools eventually chose to reconstitute themselves along these lines.[[772]](#footnote-773) Unsurprisingly, the same legislation specifically targeted the ILEA for abolition, following the dissolution of its parent body, the Greater London Council, two years previously.

The abolition of the ILEA eliminated an important, well-funded centre of educational resource production cut off its independent powers of resource production. As we have seen, materials funded and/or issued by the ILEA had influenced the development of multicultural and anti-racist education far beyond the city’s limits. Its loss would also be felt beyond the Greater London area. As the decade drew to a close, one journalist reflected that Thatcherite education policy seemed to be characterised by a ‘definite though unformulated attempt to starve multicultural education of resources and let it wither on the vine’.[[773]](#footnote-774) Along with the individual, subject-based Working Groups, Baker established a Multicultural Task Group, which was intended to formulate ‘guidelines on multicultural education in the National Curriculum’. As Sally Tomlinson notes, however, their report was never published: ‘the most that was conceded was one page in a National Curriculum Council Newsletter’.[[774]](#footnote-775)

Bob Carter and Ian Grosvenor have argued that ERA reflects the success of the New Right in establishing political hegemony.[[775]](#footnote-776) Nevertheless, the process of creating the National Curriculum also highlighted the New Right’s internal divisions. An exploration of the road to drafting and implementing the National Curriculum in History helps to display the competing and contradictory nature of the two tendencies – neoliberal and neo-conservative/social authoritarian – which had birthed it. As Thatcher herself ultimately recognised, to discipline teachers and students alike through the imposition of a centrally mandated curriculum was to extend the reach of the British state into hitherto unprecedented areas.

According to Thatcher’s chief policy advisor, Brian Griffiths, it was the Prime Minister’s fear of ‘left-wing activists imposing bad history’ on their young charges which formed a key motivation for the creation of the National Curriculum.[[776]](#footnote-777) Given history’s powerful association with the process of reproducing the nation-state, and its important role in the construction of individual identities, it is unsurprising that it proved the most controversial of all subjects slated for inclusion in the National Curriculum. The stakes were far too high for it to be otherwise. New Right commentators viewed this as a generational chance to influence the moral and ideological positions of the young. History teachers and their representative bodies (including trades unions and the HA) felt that they were fighting a rear-guard action to defend their professional dignity. Those involved in the radical educational initiatives of the previous decade found themselves in an increasingly hostile political context, faced by substantially narrower scope for autonomous experimentation. For students, as for teachers, the increased focus on graded assessment imposed restrictions on time, energy, and classroom resources – as well as presenting a newly competitive, intense emotional landscape.

**Creating the National Curriculum: The History Working Group**

The membership of the History Working Group (HWG) was determined by the Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, though appointees had to be acceptable to the Prime Minister and her advisers. The Group’s deliberations were supposed to generate a nationally enforceable curriculum with statutory status – a high risk, high reward political strategy. The ‘right’ framework and membership would guarantee and standardise a form of teaching acceptable to Thatcher and her allies. As Griffiths reflected, the ‘wrong’ choices could ‘enshrine the very weaknesses which led [the Prime Minister] to reform education in the first place’.[[777]](#footnote-778) Thatcher’s correspondence reveals a deep concern with Baker’s initial proposals for membership of the HWG, especially with regards to the inclusion of Denis Shemilt in the list of appointees. Shemilt was, by virtue of his involvement in the innovatory, skills-based SCHP, strongly associated with the ‘new history’. Thatcher greeted the suggestion of his appointment with dismay; in her eyes, it was ‘better not have a core curriculum’ than one based on the ‘new history’.[[778]](#footnote-779) Alan Beattie and Sheila Lawlor, both associated with the educational interventions of the Centre for Policy Studies, were proposed as alternatives.

In accordance with Thatcher’s wishes, Shemilt was ultimately removed from the proposed list of appointees.[[779]](#footnote-780) His place was not, however, taken by a representative of the CPS. Instead, Baker appointed Dr John Roberts – an academic historian whose political sympathies were not a matter of public record. The decision to include Roberts was redolent of the general tone of the HWG: its members were not hardline Thatcherites, but educators of indeterminate, uncommitted, and/or uncontroversial political and ideological leanings. Roberts was joined by a collection of teachers, academics, and educational advisors, chaired by the aristocratic former naval officer Commander Michael Saunders Watson (a full list is included in Appendix B). This eclectic group were united by their apparent role as consensus appointees – none raised particular controversy from either side of the political divide.

Roberts subsequently resigned (for personal and professional, not political reasons) and was replaced by Peter Marshall, Professor of Imperial History at King’s College London. Marshall reflected that the Secretary of State purposely sought candidates who were believed to be ‘sort of middle of the road’.[[780]](#footnote-781) This applied particularly to the ‘skills *versus* content’ debate: members were chosen on the basis that they were neither firmly committed to the Schools History Project, nor aligned with the New Right’s critique of the ‘new history’. Similarly, the HWG member Dr Alice Prochaska (Librarian of the Institute for Historical Research) noted that none of her colleagues had taken ‘unalterable positions’ in contemporary debates on history teaching.[[781]](#footnote-782) For the libertarian strand of Conservative thought, the preservation of the political autonomy of the HWG was imperative. From a public relations standpoint, it was also important that the National Curriculum in History was not perceived as a political volleyball, subject to the whims of the government of the day.[[782]](#footnote-783) As the former teacher and HWG member Chris Culpin later recalled, Saunders Watson was adept at ‘keeping the politicians at arm’s-length’: his aristocratic and naval background placed him in a position where he owed ‘nothing to nobody’.[[783]](#footnote-784) Consequently, the Working Group was largely free from direct intervention. Indeed, Thatcher seems to have resented her inability to ‘*tell* them some of the things that must be taught [emphasis in original]’.[[784]](#footnote-785)

Nevertheless, HWG members shared an awareness that the curriculum they produced must be ideologically acceptable to Thatcher and her allies.[[785]](#footnote-786) The Group also operated within the confines of political possibility shaped by the hegemonic force of the New Right. In 1986, the Hillgate Group had called for a national curriculum to guarantee the transmission of traditional values as a coherent and ‘testable’ body of knowledge.[[786]](#footnote-787) According to this framework, history teaching should eschew ‘skills’ and ‘concepts’ in favour of narrative and facts. As her response to the HWG’s Interim Report would demonstrate, Thatcher shared much the same approach.

According to its terms of reference, the HWG was expected to ‘take into account the broad framework for assessment and testing’ previously announced by the government, in response to reports produced by the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT).[[787]](#footnote-788) TGAT recommended that specified sets of skills and knowledge should be assigned to progressively ‘levelled’ Attainment Targets (ATs). Levelling was intended to provide a framework for academic development which could be understood by teachers, parents, and pupils. In the case of history, it was also expected to guarantee the place of knowledge in the school curriculum. The vague criteria governing the selection of content for GCSE were no longer politically acceptable; as Robert Phillips notes, some form of detailed prescription was now inevitable.[[788]](#footnote-789) Only two questions remained to be answered: what knowledge would be included in the new curriculum, and by what rationale would it be chosen?

The HWG’s terms of reference were accompanied by a longer set of ‘supplementary guidance’, issued by Baker and designed to set the terms for discussion. This specified that school history must ‘help pupils come to understand how a free and democratic society has developed over the centuries’.[[789]](#footnote-790) Therefore, the proposed programmes of study should have at their core the history of Britain, its ‘political, constitutional and cultural heritage’, and the country’s role ‘as a European, Commonwealth and world power’. Finally, the curriculum must cultivate an awareness of the legacy of ‘classical civilisations’. There was more than a hint of Whiggishness in these specifications. Baker seemed to view history as the gradual unfolding of the nation’s destiny, measured through incremental political progress. In his inclusion of ‘classical civilisation’ – normally a shorthand for Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome – it is difficult to ignore an implication that Britain was heir to this heritage. The idea that Britain had developed in unbroken line from classical civilisation, and especially the Roman Empire, was an old form of imperial justification.[[790]](#footnote-791)

Minutes and notes from the HWG’s meetings illustrate its members’ responses to the guidelines. Roberts argued that common values and strong collective consciousness gave nations the confidence to ‘tolerate’ difference.[[791]](#footnote-792) He therefore endorsed Baker’s vision of a curriculum which foregrounded study of the national past. Roberts did not envisage such study as uncritical, but his essay is nevertheless laden with celebratory national exceptionalism. History teaching must, he suggested, recognise the ‘unique institutional continuity’ which characterised the British historical experience (Roberts made the somewhat contentious claim that the English monarchy was the world’s second longest surviving political institution, after the Papacy). Roberts’ emphasis on continuity as a hallmark of national identity recalls conservative commentary on multicultural and anti-racist education, which portrayed breaks in historical continuity as anti-national.

Roberts’ reasoning cannot be assumed to have been shared by his co-workers. However, Prochaska’s later reflections on the HWG indicate that the centrality of British history was ‘quite happily accepted’ by the Group, albeit with an understanding that this history was internationally entangled and pluralist in nature.[[792]](#footnote-793) Prochaska reasoned that the majority of children attending school in the UK would spend their adult lives as British citizens; they would therefore require good understanding of the forces which had shaped the identities and institutions surrounding them. The focus, then, was on what aspects of the national story needed to be included in the limited space of the prospective curriculum.

Unsurprisingly, given its contemporary political resonances, the place of British imperialism proved especially divisive. The HWG proposed a British-focused Unit, ‘Expansion, Trade and Industry: c1700-1860’, which would situate the rapid economic, social, political, and cultural changes of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the ‘wider context of the growth and development of the British Empire’.[[793]](#footnote-794) It was hoped that the course would equip students with the knowledge and skills to ‘make their own objective assessments’ of imperialism and its legacies. These seem lofty aspirations, given the Group’s own persistent uncertainty in tackling the theme of empire.

Working documents produced by the HWG in May 1989 indicate that KS3 was originally supposed to feature a programme of study dedicated to ‘Empire’ as a broad historical theme, though drawing on a largely British context.[[794]](#footnote-795) The documents comprise notes on approach – rather than content – written with an awareness of the controversy that the topic may arouse. ‘Nothing under the carpet’, one bullet point reads: the ‘slave trade should be faced head on’. Yet the author carefully appended a note on Attainment Targets, specifying that students must acquire a clear sense of place and time.[[795]](#footnote-796) The requirement to historicise empire would, they suggested, ‘guard against oversimplified approaches and quick stereotypes’. What were these ‘oversimplified approaches’ and ‘quick stereotypes’? The author could be talking about the need to place the ideology of racism in its appropriate historical context, in order to avoid reinforcing racialised bullying and/or discrimination against Black students. However, I believe their concern had a different source. We have previously seen how educators embraced the teaching of German, South African, and north American racism(s) in order to avoid ‘sensitive’ questions of historical guilt and responsibility in their own country. The shame felt by White students at being identified with racism, via RAT, became a popular preoccupation of educators following events at Burnage. The supposed cultivation and abuse of ‘liberal guilt’ by the ‘race lobby’ was also a rallying cry for the New Right. Writing in this context, it seems likely that the author was worried about the potential risk to White sensibilities of a module covering the origins of racial privilege.

The same document went on to suggest that teaching must address the ‘insoluble balance sheet’ of empire.[[796]](#footnote-797) Educators should describe both the ‘pros’ (‘spread of modern administration and justice; modest beginnings of industrialisation; medicine; education’) and ‘cons’ (‘colonial wars, slave trade; destruction of Indian textile industry’) of British imperialism in order for students to ‘make their own minds up’. As previously noted, the application of a ‘balance sheet’ to imperial history carries the implication that ‘wrongs’ can be negated, cancelled-out, or redeemed by ‘rights’.[[797]](#footnote-798) As such, it represents an exercise in imperial justification rather than a neutral vehicle for balancing evidence to reach an objective judgement.

The HWG’s desire for students to reach their own conclusions points to a deep concern with the potential for histories of empire to arouse accusations of political bias and indoctrination. This anxiety was also reflected in the attitude of the programme of study towards evidence itself. The authors took care to highlight the ‘problematic’ nature of evidence about empire and ‘empire builders’, and called for students to be given a wide range of sources – if possible from outside, ‘objective’ observers – to reach an appreciation of the variety of possible interpretations.[[798]](#footnote-799) On 29 September 1989, a decision was taken not to have a thematic HSU on the British Empire.[[799]](#footnote-800) The reasoning behind the decision is opaque, but it may have been due to an unwillingness to face the controversies outlined above. As Marshall would later reflect, the Group consciously tried to avoid including content which was ‘very obviously contentious’.[[800]](#footnote-801)

Some members of the HWG queried the implication in Baker’s guidelines that the teaching of foreign history must somehow be related to the British past. The objectors, Prochaska and Anne Low-Beer (Lecturer in Education), were reassured by Roger Hennessey, the official Observer from Her Majesty’s Inspectorate. Hennessey clarified that placing British history at the core of the curriculum did not mean that it would be the ‘centre of gravity’.[[801]](#footnote-802) The Group dispensed with a literal interpretation of Baker’s words in favour of a syllabus which would promote the study of other cultures *on their own terms*, while preserving the numerical weight of Units on predominantly or exclusively British histories. Here, the HWG reiterated world history’s embrace of pre-colonial, post-colonial, or non-colonial histories as an escape from the controversies raised by the study of empire. Such studies afforded dignity and historical agency to downwardly racialised peoples, but at the cost of erasing imperialism’s role as a major constitutive force of the modern world. An *anti*-colonial approach, such as that taken by the BEM, would examine the history of empire through the eyes of the colonised, without reducing them to objects or victims.

Prochaska celebrated the drafting of a KS3 Unit on Islamic history on the basis that it would ‘more or less guarantee’ the study of ‘an “alien” period and culture “from the inside”’.[[802]](#footnote-803) For many schools, minimally changed by the forces of world history and multicultural education, this would be a major departure from existing practice. The Unit proved divisive. It produced one of just two occasions in the HWG’s working life where votes needed to be taken to resolve disagreement.[[803]](#footnote-804) Two members felt strongly enough that they considered the Unit’s omission grounds for resignation.[[804]](#footnote-805) As Prochaska later noted, the requirement to make space for British history gave rise to ‘impossibly difficult choices about the rest of the world’.[[805]](#footnote-806)

Roberts wrote that non-British history should be drawn from ‘as wide a range of world history as possible’, but only where it was ‘genuinely accessible’ to educators.[[806]](#footnote-807) His criteria for ‘accessibility’ included the existence of established classroom materials. More controversially, it also entailed a judgement on the historical nature of given societies. While Russian and American history were believed to offer ‘illuminating contrasts’ to the British experience, ‘African history’ (listed without regard to national or regional variation) was supposedly difficult to teach, ‘except as a series of ill-documented snapshots’. ‘Eskimo’ history, meanwhile, was condemned as both ‘almost non-existent’ and ‘thin in nutritive and stimulating quality’. The idea that some societies are ‘unhistorical’, to use Hugh Trevor-Roper’s terminology, has its foundations in a colonial vision of linear progress.[[807]](#footnote-808) The ‘failure’ of African societies to conform to the norms of European modernity provided the justification for colonisation as a civilising mission. Without any sense of irony, Roberts posited this understanding as crucial to the work of multicultural education: citizens of today’s Britain should learn of the ‘immense inertia and recalcitrance to change’ of the foreign cultures amongst which they lived.[[808]](#footnote-809) History – by which Roberts seems to have meant an earlier stage on a teleological line of development – was alive, ‘walking and talking’ on the country’s multiracial streets.

There is some evidence that these views were shared more broadly by the HWG. The minutes of the Group’s fifth meeting (3-5 April 1989) reflect general agreement with the principle that the National Curriculum should not present history as a ‘continuous line of progress’only because *‘history moved at different speeds in different places* [emphasis added]’.[[809]](#footnote-810) Thus, a twentieth century ‘African bushman with stone-age existence’ might also have access to a transistor radio. The term ‘stone-age’ is revealing. It implies that societies which did not conform to a singular, Euro-American model of technological and industrial modernity were unchanging and hence unhistorical. Likewise, the ‘Chairman’s Brief’ for the fifteenth meeting (9-11 October 1989) referred to a projected HSU, ‘Native Peoples of the Americas’, as insufficiently developed.[[810]](#footnote-811) It did so in patronising terms which hinted at the same linear idea of historical progression: ‘forgive the pun but [the HSU is] a very primitive programme of study’. ‘Primitive’ was, of course, a term with its origins in the racialised hierarchisation of peoples and cultures.

**The Interim Report**

Such attitudes left their mark on the HWG’s Interim Report, published in August 1989. The proposed curriculum divided material into four categories. Of these, the ‘British, ‘European and World’, and (short- and long-term) ‘Thematic’ HSUs were all pre-drafted by the HWG. The fourth category, ‘School Designed Themes’ (SDTs), allowed taught content to be determined by teaching staff (within certain limits).[[811]](#footnote-812) KS3 was to feature three British History Study Units (HSUs), four European and World HSUs, a choice of three Thematic HSUs from a list of six, a choice of one of two Longer-Term Thematic HSUs, and three SDTs.[[812]](#footnote-813) These Units were not given equal weighting: each British HSU was to occupy a whole term, while all other Units would be assigned a half term each. At KS4, two terms were assigned for the single British HSU, two terms for three European and World HSUs, and one term for a one of two Thematic HSUs. Thus, British history represented the largest single ‘block’ on the secondary curriculum, but did *not* form a majority of Units.

The predominance of British history, as per the instructions of the Secretary of State, required justification and clarification. The Interim Report devoted considerable space to defining Britishness and to drawing a distinction between national and national*ist* history. According to the HWG, school history should ‘make pupils aware of the richness and variety of British culture and its historical origins’.[[813]](#footnote-814) The Report explicitly acknowledged the historical significance of migration to Britain. It expressed a need to historicise identity and culture in order to understand their full complexity. Finally, it recognised the plural meanings of the national in the British Isles: Britain and Ireland were not an ‘undifferentiated mass’ and should be studied with an eye to national specificity as well as to commonalities. This was to be a ‘four nations’ history, not just a history of England.

If school history functioned as a mode of ‘cultural transmission’ and communal bonding, no uniform culture could or should be imposed on the youth of society as diverse as Britain.[[814]](#footnote-815) Nevertheless, teachers were encouraged to focus on shared ‘inheritances’ (the word ‘heritage’ was eschewed due to its ideological baggage).[[815]](#footnote-816) The Report also justified history’s place in the curriculum with reference to its role in broadening pupils’ horizons; studying the history of other peoples ‘from inside’ could ‘counteract tendencies to become parochial or chauvinistic, while in no way demeaning British achievements and values’.[[816]](#footnote-817)

The European and World elements of the proposed curriculum encompassed a wide geographical scope. A representative selection includes: ‘The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Era’; ‘The American Revolution’; ‘Classical China: From the Han Dynasty to the Mongol Conquest’; and ‘India: C16th to mid-C19th – the Moghul Empire to the East India Company’ (a full list is available in Appendix C).[[817]](#footnote-818) Nevertheless, there were striking omissions. African history was particularly poorly served. At KS3, there was no opportunity to study the continent in the pre-drafted HSUs, though schools could choose to introduce African history through the use of SDTs.[[818]](#footnote-819) The optional nature of these Units, which could be exchanged for extra topics from the list of pre-determined Thematic Study Units, appeared to assign them lesser import. At KS4, teachers could choose a course focusing on post-1945 ‘modernisation’, with a case study on ‘Africa, India, or China’.[[819]](#footnote-820) African history was just one of three options. Notably, it was also the only one which encompassed an entire continent, without regard for national or regional distinction. As Dipo Faloyin writes, any vision of Africa as an undifferentiated mass (usually comprised of ‘blood, strife, […] rolling savannahs and large yellow sunsets’) strips African people of their humanity – diverse, differentiated, and complex.[[820]](#footnote-821) In this context, the desire to elide varied histories may stem from the HWG’s hierarchisation of cultures, which posited some as stagnant and unhistorical due to their deviation from the pattern of Euro-American ‘modernity’. Africa’s near exclusion from the syllabus therefore implied a judgement both of the continent’s significance (secondary) and of its very historicity.

The Interim Report detailed the broad themes and skills which all schools were expected to teach. It did not, however, specify a list of essential knowledge under the rubric of each HSU. Furthermore, and in defiance of expectations, the HWG unanimously resisted the inclusion of a separate Attainment Target for knowledge in its proposals for assessment.[[821]](#footnote-822) The Group’s objections were not based on a judgement that knowledge was unimportant. On the contrary, most members believed that the debate over ‘skills *versus* knowledge’ had been overstated and the two were mutually reinforcing and of equal import.[[822]](#footnote-823) At all times, the Group was eager to clarify that knowledge-based work should not be identified with a return to repetitive, uncritical ‘rote-learning’.[[823]](#footnote-824) The hesitancy of the HWG to specify knowledge in levelled ATs was instead primarily practical. As Saunders Watson asked, ‘how can you develop progression in a scheme of this sort? Do you take a chronological approach to progression? Are you therefore saying that Ancient History (levels 1-3) is easier than modern history?’[[824]](#footnote-825) Saunders Watson took credit for convincing the Secretary of State of the HWG’s argument, despite the latter’s initial hesitancy.

**Responses to the Interim Report**

Baker was reasonably supportive of the approach indicated by the HWG’s Interim Report and was prepared to accept its conclusions with minor revisions, pending consultation.[[825]](#footnote-826) Thatcher, on the other hand, professed herself to be ‘extremely disappointed’.[[826]](#footnote-827) Her criticisms fell into three categories: the ‘critical imbalance against content and knowledge’ in favour of interpretation and enquiry, the insufficient weight given to British history, and the failure to treat history as a chronological study of the nation’s ‘political, constitutional, cultural and religious’ past. Thatcher instructed Baker to alter his public letter to the Group’s Chairman, to incorporate a demand for ‘major not just minor changes’ to the Interim Report. These included the integration of content and knowledge into ATs, greater emphasis on British history (which was to comprise at least 50 per cent of course time at secondary level), and greater emphasis on the chronological dimension of historical practice. Baker acceded to the demand, albeit with some prevarication.[[827]](#footnote-828) The Secretary of State’s formal response to the Interim Report, ultimately published by Baker’s successor John MacGregor, asked the Working Group to address three issues when compiling the Final Report: to ensure that pupils gained a ‘proper grasp of chronology’; to increase the emphasis on British history; and to reassess its approach to historical knowledge ‘to ensure that it can be assessed’.[[828]](#footnote-829)

The publication of the Interim Report was greeted by a press frenzy. The right-wing papers, both tabloid and broadsheet, cultivated dismay at the apparent sacrifice of fact for theory and the neglect of British history.[[829]](#footnote-830) MacGregor’s letter was also widely discussed. In some quarters, the Secretary of State was lauded for standing up to the advocates of the ‘new history’ in the battle to reclaim the national past. In others, his intervention was interpreted as a sign that the government was willing to set aside democratic principles by casting the curriculum in its own image. The media furore both reflected and influenced public and professional investment in the crafting of the National Curriculum in History.

The government invited comments on the Interim Report, though they were not part of the statutory consultation process. The response was dramatic. Around 1000 written submissions were received, which included 303 secondary schools, 230 teachers, 123 organisations, and 97 private individuals.[[830]](#footnote-831) The category of ‘organisation’ comprised professional groups including the trades unions and the HA. These typically produced collective responses. As such, single submissions sometimes represented the views of ‘tens, scores or hundreds of people’.[[831]](#footnote-832) The ten regional conferences organised by the HA to discuss the Report attracted over 1100 people, principally teachers. Each produced its own report to feed back to the Working Group.[[832]](#footnote-833) By contrast, the first report of the English Working Group attracted just 170 responses in total.[[833]](#footnote-834)

Commentary drafted by the Responses sub-group of the HWG claimed that ‘compliments and expressions of sympathy’ ran through more than 95 percent of submissions (a figure of 80 per cent was given elsewhere).[[834]](#footnote-835) Members were advised not to be disheartened by lists of criticisms, which were both easier to summarise and ‘more relevant’ to the ongoing work of the Group. Interestingly, this implies that compliments were less uniform and more varied than criticisms. As the Final Report went on to acknowledge, the most common and impassioned objections addressed the ‘resource implications’ of the proposals.[[835]](#footnote-836) Teachers anticipated being placed under intense pressure by the demand for new teaching materials and in-service training. Half of all respondents identified the content of the proposed curriculum as excessive.[[836]](#footnote-837) Some attributed these concerns to the HWG’s ‘radical departure from present good practice’.[[837]](#footnote-838) The curricular developments of the 1970s were (not entirely fairly) felt to have been devalued or negated – a sentiment reflected in demands for the inclusion of popular and well-resourced topics such as the SCHP-derived GCSE course on the history of medicine.

There were widespread anxieties regarding the dominance of British history. The Secretary of State’s request to raise its proportion was negatively received. Indeed, every correspondent who mentioned MacGregor’s response also expressed concern about any future increase in the British dimension.[[838]](#footnote-839) Similarly, his suggestion that historical knowledge should be included in the ATs was ‘unanimously regarded as unhelpful’ by attendees at the HA’s regional meetings.[[839]](#footnote-840) The Responses sub-group described a category of complaint which felt that the HWG’s efforts to view foreign cultures ‘on their own terms’ had been unsuccessful. Such responses attacked the apparent Eurocentrism of the Group’s perspective, as expressed in the use of the ‘arrogant’ term ‘modernisation’ in KS4.[[840]](#footnote-841) Unlike the majority of critiques summarised by the sub-group, this was not featured in the Final Report – implying a judgement that the complaint was either insufficiently prevalent, or insufficiently important.

Objections to government interference in the curriculum were often broadened to encompass a general resistance to prescription. The Responses sub-group reported that ‘many, many responses pleaded to be left alone’.[[841]](#footnote-842) Such complaints demonstrate a common fear of deskilling and the loss of professional prestige. Educators who opposed prescription were portrayed in stridently hostile terms, as representative of the ‘arrogance of the teaching profession, which so often believes it has a monopoly of wisdom on what should be taught and how’. The sub-group argued that there was too much evidence of popular dissatisfaction with teaching quality for this ‘conceit’ to be tenable. To leave teachers to their own devices would be a ‘recipe for continuing disaster’. Thus, they argued that the Final Report should note that the Group *had* taken notice of good practice – and insist that ‘there is not too much of that about’.

The sub-group complained of a certain ‘inconsistency’ in teachers’ responses:

In the same letters which argued we should not prescribe, vehement complaints were scored about the omission of certain favourite areas such as the growth of fascism and the Reformation. One could not help thinking that they were saying to prescribe was fine, as long as they could choose the prescription.[[842]](#footnote-843)

There was no real contradiction here: teachers were simply asking for a continuation of the status quo, in which curricular decisions were their own prerogative. In so doing, they pointed to the impossibility of the HWG’s final goal: the creation of a universal curriculum able to educate the nation in all its diversity and complexity. The Group’s work simply could not take into consideration the manifold influences on existing syllabi, including the resource supplies and constraints of individual schools, and the specific demands of their surrounding communities.

The Responses sub-group reported that the most commonly cited omissions of content were as follows: the Holocaust, the rise of fascism and Nazi Germany, the First and Second World Wars, the Reformation, the history of medicine, and the history of continental Europe.[[843]](#footnote-844) Commonly taught areas such as the Reformation, the history of medicine, and the two World Wars were well-resourced, and teachers likely felt confident delivering them. Hence, there was a practical dimension to anger over their omission. However, the peculiar vehemence with which people argued for the inclusion of the World Wars (in particular the Second) implies that there was also an ideological basis some of these concerns. At KS4, the ‘single most repeated’ objection related to the omission of the two World Wars and connected studies such as the Holocaust and fascism.[[844]](#footnote-845) Marshall would later recall that the single most ‘contentious’ decision made by the Interim Report was to eschew the Second World War in favour of ‘post-war developments’.[[845]](#footnote-846) As the teacher and HWG member Robert Guyver noted, the omission of the Second World War was popularly regarded as an error ‘not so much on historical grounds as for moral and ethical reasons’.[[846]](#footnote-847) To this might be added reasons of national pride and the construction of post-imperial identities.

The HWG had originally opted to omit the Nazis in part because of the comparatively short period covered by the dictatorship (twelve years).[[847]](#footnote-848) The Group believed that the emphasis of a National Curriculum introduced in the final years of the twentieth century had to be on educating the citizens of the twenty first.[[848]](#footnote-849) It therefore had to anticipate which events would have the greatest impact in the long term. John Roberts, widely believed to have been the chief motivating force behind the decision, simply did not believe that the Second World War and associated studies fit this criterion. As the Group’s internal papers argued, ‘by the next century when the war generation has gone and yet our present pupils will just be reaching KS4, this period will be seen in an entirely different perspective’.[[849]](#footnote-850)

The National Curriculum in History was intended to confirm and enact such a shift. Marshall credited the decision to omit the Second World War, fascism, and the Holocaust to the HWG’s perception that Britain was mired in a nostalgic and celebratory ‘obsession’ with this part of history.[[850]](#footnote-851) Gareth Elwyn Jones, a HWG member and Reader in Education at the University College of Wales, expressed a personal belief that these topics ‘occupied too central a role in secondary school history’, especially in the upper years.[[851]](#footnote-852) The stranglehold exerted by the twentieth century dictatorships (both fascism and Stalinism) on GCSE and A Level studies was deemed to negatively impact pupils’ overall ‘historical understanding’. Elwyn Jones doubted that students below the age of sixteen possessed the maturity necessary to comprehend the scale of the horrors. He also hinted at the problems of superficial treatment and the ‘fascination of evil’ – a fascination which Roberts defined as distinctly unhealthy. Yet it was precisely this national obsession which made the Working Group’s decision controversial, and which ultimately rendered it unworkable.

Marshall described a ‘popular reaction’ against the exclusion of the Second World War and the Holocaust from the Interim Report.[[852]](#footnote-853) Jewish organisations were concerned that the move amounted to historical erasure or denial. The Holocaust Educational Trust mobilised to ensure its inclusion in future drafts of the National Curriculum.[[853]](#footnote-854) Two charities representing veterans, the Royal British Legion and the Western Front Association, also submitted complaints. Public anxieties were echoed and amplified by politicians. A cross-party group of MPs (Greville Janner, John Marshall, Robert Rhodes James, and Jeff Rooker) penned a ‘Submission on the Teaching of the Second World War and the Rise and Fall of Nazi Germany in the National Curriculum for History’, sent jointly to the Secretary of State and the HWG.[[854]](#footnote-855) Their argument rested on three, interlinked poles: the popular fascination with the war, the war as a matter of national pride, and the war’s enduring emotional resonance.

Interventions in Parliament took a similar tone and again cut across party-lines. The Conservative MP John Marshall wondered why the ‘history mandarins’ were apparently unimpressed by ‘our finest hour’.[[855]](#footnote-856) In the House of Lords, the Labour politician Lord Bottomley argued that the war merited inclusion as the ‘greatest event in world history this century’.[[856]](#footnote-857) Such responses illustrate the enduring, outstanding hold of the Second World War on the national imagination. They also hint at one of the reasons behind this dominance. To return briefly to the arguments of Chapter 1, and to the analysis of Paul Gilroy, the Second World War is appealing for its ‘uncomplicated moral architecture’, which allows the nation’s military glory and masculine heroism to be celebrated without any hint of postcolonial guilt.[[857]](#footnote-858)

Significantly, the Second World War’s omission from the Interim Report provided the occasion for the single most interventionist stance taken by the government towards the HWG.[[858]](#footnote-859) In response to questions from John Marshall and Greville Janner, the Minister of State for Education and Science, Angela Rumbold, announced that the war would be included in the Final Report of the HWG – *before the Group had made a formal decision to do so*.[[859]](#footnote-860) Rumbold’s interference was considered a serious enough breach of the principle of autonomy that a senior civil servant telephoned Saunders Watson to issue an apology.[[860]](#footnote-861) Given the intense public response, the HWG was already seriously considering the inclusion of the Second World War in their Final Report. It is therefore unlikely that Rumbold influenced the Group’s decision to create a new Core Unit at KS4 entitled ‘The Era of the Second World War: 1933-1949’.[[861]](#footnote-862) Nevertheless, her intervention – unusual and surprising to Working Group members – illustrates the exceptional status of the war within British political culture.

**The Final Report**

The Final Report of the HWG contained some major structural changes from its predecessor. The proposed curriculum comprised a list of Core and Option Units, as well as a single School Designed History Study Unit (SDHSU) at both KS3 and KS4.[[862]](#footnote-863) All topics were accompanied by a set of ‘essential information’ – content which had a statutory basis and would be formally assessed – and non-statutory ‘exemplary information’. Option Units were divided into four categories, representing British history, European history, American history, and a non-Western culture ‘from its own perspective’. At KS4, the Option Units were divided into two categories, one grouping European and north American history, and the other devoted to the history of the rest of the world. At both KS3 and KS4, schools would have to teach one topic from each category. A complete list of Units, alongside brief explanatory comments, is included in Appendix C.

The HWG’s new plans displayed a genuine attempt to respond to feedback. Schools were given the opportunity to continue teaching the popular topic of the Reformation in a new KS3 Unit (‘Reformation and Religious Diversity in Western Europe in C16th’).[[863]](#footnote-864) At KS4, the Group answered concerns regarding the inflexibility of previous proposals by introducing a new SDHSU. KS4 also featured an increased number of world history options, including a Unit specifically focused on African histories (‘Africa South of the Sahara since 1945’). Most importantly, the HWG had increased the proportion of British history in line with government demands. On 13 July 1990, MacGregor informed Thatcher that the amount of British history, including local history, would in practice now ‘exceed half the syllabus’.[[864]](#footnote-865) The Group’s efforts in this regard led to some interesting differences in emphasis to the Interim Report.

The Interim Report’s nuanced approach to Britishness was reiterated.[[865]](#footnote-866) As such, the increased emphasis on British history did not necessarily lead to a simplistic, inward-looking, or jingoistic narrative of the past. Instead, a flawed yet complex picture emerged of imperial entanglement. While the Interim Report had maintained an uncomfortable silence on Irish history, the Final Report presented a new Option Unit focused specifically on Ireland. To recognise the Irish past was to recognise the legacy of empire within the British Isles and to acknowledge the imperial constitution of British identity*.* In its description of the new Unit, ‘Culture and Society in Ireland up to Early C20th’, the HWG stepped away from a teleological understanding of history to argue that Ireland’s painful past proved that ‘change’ and ‘progress’ should not be conflated.[[866]](#footnote-867) The ‘essential information’ also gave due attention to Irish resistance to imperial rule.

At KS3, the list of Option Units restored space to the British Empire (‘The British Empire at its Zenith: 1877 to 1905’). The emphasis was to be on British experiences, supplemented by a case study focusing on either India or South Africa. The ‘essential information’ specified for the Unit included both the ‘ideals and responsibilities of empire’ and ‘contemporary criticisms of empire’, as articulated in Britain.[[867]](#footnote-868) Thus, criticisms of ‘exploitation’ would be appropriately historicised rather than treated as moralistic modern anachronisms. Nevertheless, the Unit struggled to shake the ‘balance sheet’ framework which had accompanied its early drafts. The ‘costs and benefits of empire to Britain’ were to be studied alongside the ‘transfer of science, technology and expertise’ to the colonies. Listed under the latter heading were the railways and telegraphs; tropical medicine (including the control of malaria); and the ecological transfer of cocoa and rubber. The HWG seemed to throw its weight behind a self-redemptive vision of British imperial history.

Despite some significant changes, there were areas where the Group held their ground. Members resisted the pressure to make the Final Report acceptable to the government by placing further limitations on teachers’ professional autonomy, or by allowing further erosion of non-Western elements of the proposals. Phillips reports that one member was willing to resign over the latter principle.[[868]](#footnote-869) Significantly, the Group also insisted on maintaining their original position on the testing of knowledge, in defiance of governmental opinion. The Final Report aimed to give equal weight to ‘knowledge, understanding and skills’ as mutually reinforcing components of a historical education; as the Report argued, ‘knowledge as understanding cannot be achieved without a knowledge of historical information’.[[869]](#footnote-870) The HWG added that they had no intention of taking sides in the debate between traditional teaching and the ‘new history’ – a debate which they described as ‘contrived’ and ‘exaggerated’.[[870]](#footnote-871)

In practical terms, this meant an emphasis on the study of factual content, contained within the ‘essential information’ of each Programme of Study, and the continued exclusion of knowledge from ATs. As before, the HWG argued that the levelling of historical information rested on the absurd premise that one fact or period was inherently more difficult than another.[[871]](#footnote-872) To make such value judgements was to invite controversy and to run the risk that the resulting curriculum would be seen as a step towards a calcified ‘official history’. The existence of multiple ‘levels’ of ability within a single class could also lead to teachers being forced to deliver multiple historical periods simultaneously.

**Responses to the Final Report**

Knowledge remained a point of contention with the government. MacGregor displayed an initial hesitancy to endorse the conclusions of the Final Report. On 30 March, *The Times Educational Supplement* (TES) broke a story detailing Thatcher’s continued dissatisfaction with the HWG’s approach to ‘factual information’.[[872]](#footnote-873) The New Right once again mobilised. Skidelsky, for example, described the Final Report as an improvement on its predecessor, but argued that it remained ‘biased against knowledge’.[[873]](#footnote-874) In concert with other academics, and alongside the former Lewes Priory history teachers Freeman and McGovern, he formed the History Curriculum Association (HCA) – a group dedicated to campaigning for the inclusion of a knowledge AT.[[874]](#footnote-875)

On 4 April, the day after the Report’s publication, Thatcher gave an interview to the *Sunday Telegraph* which reiterated her stance on historical knowledge. She argued that students must leave school with a strong, chronological grasp of British history: ‘whether it is the reigns, whether it is the treaties, whether it is the repeal of the Corn Laws […] you must have some facts to think with’.[[875]](#footnote-876) Yet the article also offered a more surprising basis for the Prime Minister’s opposition: the Report, she believed, was too prescriptive. In Thatcher’s eyes, the curriculum must specify ‘a basic certain number of things, the basic sweep of [British history]’ – a minimum core of content. Beyond this, however, teachers should be left to their own devices. Otherwise, the government would risk crushing the creative autonomy that made subjects exciting and inspiring. Thatcher, it seemed, wanted the impossible: a set list of content, bordering on an official history, which nevertheless preserved the traditional professional prerogatives of British educators.

As Phillips has argued, the contradiction in her argument points to a wider tension between the principles of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism: an appetite for social control here came into conflict with the principle of freedom.[[876]](#footnote-877) Thatcher was far from the only member of the diverse political constellation of the New Right to become disillusioned with the fraught balancing act of the National Curriculum. Fred Naylor, of PACE and Dewsbury fame, wrote that ERA’s good intentions – the raising of educational standards – were cancelled out by the sacrifice of ‘parental choice’ through centralist prescription.[[877]](#footnote-878)

The Final Report had always been intended to go out to consultation, under the auspices of a dedicated body (the National Curriculum Council, or NCC). However, governmental unease led to the addition of an extra period of consultation.[[878]](#footnote-879) Comments were invited from ‘interested bodies’, including all English LEAs.[[879]](#footnote-880) These were to reach MacGregor by 15 June. In the meantime, the School Examinations Assessment Council (SEAC) would provide guidance on the ‘effective assessment of pupils’ mastery of historical knowledge’.[[880]](#footnote-881) Only then would the Secretary of State issue his own comments on the Report. The extended consultation represented a major delay in the process of giving statutory basis to the National Curriculum in History. Nevertheless, it was welcomed by those with a stake in the debate, who correctly understood this as a final, unanticipated opportunity to shape the future of British history teaching.[[881]](#footnote-882)

The HA seized the chance to discuss the Final Report at fourteen regional conferences.[[882]](#footnote-883) It expressed concern that the media tendency to highlight ‘divisions and personalities’ was having a distorting effect on the creation of the National Curriculum:

By giving excessive prominence to academic “big names” (many of them long retired and far removed from the challenges of day to day [sic.] teaching in school) the history debate has been hijacked from the classroom professionals who will be called upon to implement the changes in historical education.[[883]](#footnote-884)

In the eyes of the HA, the new period of consultation represented an opportunity to place the voices its 7000-strong membership – most of whom had experience ‘at the chalk-face’ of education – back at the centre of the debate.[[884]](#footnote-885)

The Chairman of the HA’s Education Committee, Martin Roberts, set the general tone for the organisation’s approach. Roberts acknowledged the difficulty of the task assigned to the HWG and praised their responsiveness to critical feedback on the Interim Report.[[885]](#footnote-886) The Final Report was not flawless; Roberts took particular issue with the impracticality of the ‘statements of attainment’ which described each AT level. On the whole, however, he found the Report to be less prescriptive than its predecessor and to contain fewer significant omissions. The HWG had produced a document which articulated a clear, logical, and balanced resolution of the recent ‘pedagogical disputes’ which had rocked the discipline, such as the manufactured debate between knowledge and skills. Roberts’ overall judgement was one of cautious optimism. He argued that the curriculum laid out by the Final Report would prove a durable foundation for history teaching and for public confidence in the profession.

The sentiment of acceptance, hedged with doubt, was shared by Ian Dawson, a Lecturer in History at Trinity and All Saints College, who responded to the Final Report in the HA journal *Teaching History.* Dawson characterised his reaction as divided between ‘head’ and ‘heart’:

My head says “support it” – at least it ensures history has a place in the National Curriculum and therefore all children will study history; the Attainment Targets are better than they might have been; nothing stands still and it's bound to be improved. My heart says “reject it” – it’s flawed fundamentally in its approach to chronology and syllabus construction; it wastes so much existing good practice; above all it's a missed opportunity which doesn't do full justice to the people who really matter – the pupils who will study, the people from the past who are being studied and the teachers who will ensure it succeeds.[[886]](#footnote-887)

Dawson’s ‘head’ ultimately won. Despite his misgivings, the Final Report was the ‘best political compromise’ available in the spring and summer of 1990, and was certainly better than some of the plausible alternatives.

According to Phillips, this ‘could be worse’ attitude permeated the HA.[[887]](#footnote-888) As such, members were encouraged to rally around the Final Report. The Association was partly motivated by rumours that history was at risk of being dropped as a Foundation subject. For the HA, the Final Report represented the ‘big prize’: a guaranteed place for history in primary and secondary classrooms.[[888]](#footnote-889) To this end, the HA sought to build a supportive consensus at its regional conferences. It countered objections concerning prescription with the strategic claim that ‘teachers could be creative in their interpretation’ of the future curriculum. As Dawson wrote, he could not help but hope that ‘the NCC and time will produce some improvements’.[[889]](#footnote-890)

When faced with the threat of history’s demotion from the status of Foundation subject, the academic world similarly rallied. An Editorial in *The Historian* reported that eminent historians, from ‘Marxist to High Tory’, were prepared to declare ‘an uneasy truce’ to demonstrate to the Secretary of State that their feud was ‘nothing but healthy public debate’.[[890]](#footnote-891) At all levels of education, it seems that compromise was accepted. A (conditional, hesitant) consensus was constructed to preserve history’s status as a discipline – and that of its teachers.

Complaints which reached the DES as part of the consultation process indicated enduring, practical concerns regarding resource constraints and the extra burden which the National Curriculum would represent for limited school budgets.[[891]](#footnote-892) Some significant pedagogical and ideological objections also remained. These fell into two major categories: the restrictions placed on teachers’ professional autonomy and the overwhelming dominance of British history. Both were widely shared. In both primary and secondary school responses, ‘the commonest critical adjective was “prescriptive”.’ Additionally,

With only a few exceptions, respondents felt that there is now too much British history in the course, with European history and, to a lesser extent, world history being seriously neglected. Many also felt that the British history is Anglocentric, with the inclusion of Welsh, Scottish and Irish topics in the HSUs being largely tokenistic. On top of this, many also felt they could detect an ethnocentric, monocultural approach to this subject.[[892]](#footnote-893)

In some cases, objections framed the Report as a missed opportunity to embed the lessons of multicultural education in the National Curriculum. Schools regretted the absence of opportunities to teach pupils ‘about their roots’, for example ‘pre-colonial Africa’ (such responses perhaps betray a patronising and essentialist, if well-intentioned, assumption of pupils’ identity).[[893]](#footnote-894) There seems to have been a division between various groups of respondents on this issue. While schools and LEAs were concerned with the increase in British history, its framework, and the implications for balance in the curriculum, an internal analysis of responses to the Secretary of State’s consultation exercise suggests that organisational responses largely ‘expressed support for the prescribed arrangements’.[[894]](#footnote-895)

In some cases, critiques of British dominance extended to the content and framing of individual HSUs. The Final Report’s new module on imperial history, ‘The British Empire at its Zenith: 1877 to 1905’, was singled out for criticism, in part because its title was viewed as ‘value-loaded’.[[895]](#footnote-896) A later interview with Peter Marshall offers fascinating insight into the module’s reception amongst educators – and to contemporary approaches to empire. ‘Even in 1990’, Marshall asserted, plans to teach empire (especially in the context of a statutorily defined National Curriculum) provoked ‘panic’.[[896]](#footnote-897) The prevailing ‘cultural climate’ of imperial nostalgia formed a toxic combination with fears of government interference and the prescription of an official history. Teachers seem to have assumed that any attempt to include empire in the National Curriculum amounted to indoctrination and/or education for national pride. Marshall recalled an ‘awful occasion’ when a trainee teacher approached him to object that the module was an ‘insult’ to Black people. Marshall’s response was simple: ‘no, we’re just trying to get you to think about it’; the module’s intention was critical study, not blind endorsement. He pointed to the work of Eric Williams to demonstrate that critical histories of empire were both possible and instructive.[[897]](#footnote-898)

MacGregor articulated his response to the consultation in a letter to Thatcher, sent on 13 July 1990. In it, he indicated satisfaction with the proportion of British history in the Final Report and noted the opinion of critics that there was now too much: any more would risk ‘unbalanc[ing] the whole’.[[898]](#footnote-899) MacGregor emphasised the high number of respondents who agreed that historical content should be placed in the Programmes of Study, as opposed to the ATs. He observed that the consensus amongst *teachers* on this matter was ‘predictable’ – what was more surprising was the ‘large majority among professional historians who believe the recommendations are sound’. MacGregor was reluctantly convinced of the validity of their argument. He was more concerned with the issue of prescription and excessive detail, which may leave ‘insufficient scope for good teachers’ – signalling agreement with Thatcher’s *Sunday Telegraph* interview. The Secretary of State anticipated reducing the quantity of factual material specified by the curriculum.

The letter took a distinctly defensive tone. MacGregor was careful to note the ‘political and practical limits’ on his scope for future action.[[899]](#footnote-900) He reminded a hostile Thatcher that he could not abandon a Report which had now ‘received very wide support’. Indeed, it was impossible for him to rewrite any content himself, as ‘to do so would bring charges of political interference in the history taught in schools’. Finally, he pleaded that the overall framework must not be relaxed to such a degree that the National Curriculum failed to provide a ‘rigorous guide for history teachers’.

Guided by the above, MacGregor suggested a compromise on the pressing issue of knowledge and factual information: the first AT would heretofore be renamed ‘Knowledge and Understanding’ and given greater weighting within the scheme of assessment.[[900]](#footnote-901) The problem of content overload and prescription would be addressed by slimming down the level of detail in the Programmes of Study, giving schools the chance to ‘design all four non-core history units’, and reducing the total number of HSUs by one. The proposed victims of the cut, unsurprisingly, would be non-European history.

**The History Task Group and Kenneth Clarke’s Interventions**

MacGregor’s proposals informed the work of the History Task Group (HTG) of the NCC. The NCC’s own consultation process confirmed the controversial nature of the balance between local, British, European and world history: statistical analysis revealed that just 23 per cent agreed with the balance, to 33 per cent who disagreed.[[901]](#footnote-902) Nearly 24 per cent specifically wished to see a reduction in the amount of British history. The HTG worked at the intersection of several competing influences: the demands of government, the existing work of the HWG, the feedback derived from extensive consultation processes, and its own organisational identity and aspirations for the National Curriculum. As Phillips notes, the Group saw its role as ensuring the ‘rigour, breadth and balance’ of the National Curriculum.[[902]](#footnote-903)

The HTG endorsed MacGregor’s compromise on the position of knowledge. Members also hoped to tackle prescription and overload by reducing content and providing a framework for core study units which offered both ‘concise focus statements’ and the ‘historical information which “pupils should be taught about”’.[[903]](#footnote-904) This was to replace the detailed lists of information which characterised the Final Report. A reduction in prescribed content did not, however, entail a total reappraisal of teachers’ professional autonomy. The HTG’s commitment to academic rigour led it to reject the SDHSUs favoured by MacGregor in favour of supplementary units accompanied by specific criteria for study; it recommended the abolition of SDHSUs at KS2 and KS3. This would have the additional advantage of allowing the Group to specify and guarantee the study of a non-European society in an attempt to promote balance.

Like the Final Report, the NCC’s recommendations invited broad consensus.[[904]](#footnote-905) It was all the more surprising, then, when the new Secretary of State Kenneth Clarke destabilised one of the foundational assumptions of the drafting process. Clarke had been appointed in recognition of his combative approach; Thatcher trusted him to resolve the government’s long-running battle with the teaching profession over pay and conditions, which had already generated a two-year period of industrial action (1984-1986).[[905]](#footnote-906) His first major act as Secretary of State confirmed Thatcher’s character judgement. Clarke took to the stage at the North of England Education Conference to proclaim that history and geography would no longer be compulsory at KS4: instead, students at ages thirteen to fourteen would choose just one of the two subjects to take forwards.

The impact of this act cannot be overstated. In general terms, it confirmed the political malleability of the National Curriculum, emphasising that what was taught in schools would henceforth be subject to the whims of successive ministers and/or governments.[[906]](#footnote-907) More specifically, Clarke’s decision ‘seemed to leave the HA’s strategy of defending the compulsory teaching of history up to the age of 16 in tatters’.[[907]](#footnote-908) The good-faith bargain which many believed they had made – to compromise on framework and content in exchange for a guaranteed place for history in the nation’s schools – was reneged upon without warning or discussion. Understandably, the move was deeply resented. Interested parties, including the HA, lobbied unsuccessfully for the return of compulsory history at KS4.

Clarke’s other major decision as Secretary of State added insult to injury. He endorsed the amendments made by the NCC but appended his own revisions – the most significant being a twenty-year ‘date cap’ on historical study.[[908]](#footnote-909) Clarke’s intervention pertained to two twentieth century units of the revised KS4 (‘The Development of British Democracy’ and ‘International Conflict and Co-operation’). Under his proposal, both would be given a rolling limit of twenty years from the present. As Phillips observes, this was a less extreme version of Clarke’s original plan, which had been tempered by DES intervention.[[909]](#footnote-910) Earlier propositions focused on 1900 (representative of the height of Britain’s imperial power), 1939 (rejected for its exclusion of the Second World War), and 1945 (symbolic of military and moral pride) as the endpoint of the national story.[[910]](#footnote-911)

Teachers correctly surmised that ‘date-capping’ was born out of a mistrust of their professional capacity to tackle politically relevant subjects.[[911]](#footnote-912) Answers supplied by the Secretary of State to a House of Commons debate suggested that the majority of parental complaints of political bias in the classroom related to teaching about ‘current issues’.[[912]](#footnote-913) On the defensive, Clarke noted that most teachers were able to handle such matters with ‘full regard’ to their legal duty, imposed by the Conservative government in 1986, to ensure a ‘balanced presentation of opposing views’. However, recent events inevitably aroused the ‘strongest feelings’ and were thus safest excluded from the classroom. He may have had in mind the First Gulf War which, as we will see, was proving divisive in British classrooms.[[913]](#footnote-914)

The notion that proximity to the present determines the controversy of a given event is historically questionable. Furthermore, as civil servants informed Clarke, the National Curriculum had the power to mandate content but not exclude it from classrooms; to leave current issues out of the National Curriculum may have the reverse of the intended effect, by excluding these issues from government regulation.[[914]](#footnote-915) The Secretary of State, however, was not to be moved. The so-called ‘twenty-year rule’ eventually left little practical impact upon the National Curriculum owing to changes made by the Dearing Review (see below).[[915]](#footnote-916) Nevertheless, Clarke’s proposal was symptomatic of the mistrust with which the government approached the teaching profession, and of the increasingly fraught relationship between the two parties.

*History in the National Curriculum (England)* (1991), the document released to accompany Clarke’s Statutory Orders for the National Curriculum, was vastly different to the Reports issued by the HWG. At KS3, the new syllabus featured five Core and 3 Supplementary Units (a complete list is to be found in Appendix C).[[916]](#footnote-917) The British Core Units remained basically intact. The single most important change was the addition of the Unit entitled ‘The Era of the Second World War’, originally to be found in KS4. With the removal of History as a compulsory subject in KS4, the module had been transferred to ensure that students dropping history at fourteen would be taught at least some twentieth century content.[[917]](#footnote-918) The choice to move this module *specifically* was a reflection of its demonstrable cultural and political importance.

Teachers were also given more freedom to choose non-British content in the Supplementary Units. Curricula were now obliged to include an ‘episode or turning point in European history’ and the ‘study of a past non-European society’, but named topics were excluded from the final document.[[918]](#footnote-919) The topics chosen by the HWG figured here only as suggestions. This reflected an overall trend towards a reduction in detail and prescription in the new curriculum. Core modules were now accompanied by short, relatively broad lists of compulsory content, as opposed to the detailed information supplied in the Final Report of the HWG.

Depth and prescription were also reduced at KS4. Two Core Units with an exclusively British emphasis were accompanied by a third which set twentieth century British economic, social and cultural changes in a world context. Of the two Supplementary Units, one was designed to extend pupils’ knowledge of British history. The other invited teachers to explore a ‘country or region of the world other than Britain’, from a geographically varied list of options (see Appendix C).[[919]](#footnote-920)

**The Dearing Review**

The KS4 curriculum was never to be implemented. The National Curriculum had been slated for a staggered introduction into schools, beginning in September 1989. Teaching had not yet begun at KS4 when a further review of the National Curriculum was announced in 1993, amidst escalating complaints of overload and overwork and a teacher-led, national boycott of standard assessment tests (SATs).[[920]](#footnote-921) A new body, the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA), was created to formulate and enact the necessary changes, under the Chairmanship of Sir Ron Dearing. The announcement of the ‘Dearing Review’ led the government to postpone the introduction of the National Curriculum Orders for history at KS4.[[921]](#footnote-922) Dearing would later confirm that post-fourteen students could drop *both* history and geography. As before, GCSE examining boards were free to set the framework and content of their own syllabi within certain broad criteria.[[922]](#footnote-923)

Dearing focused on two aspects of the curriculum: reforming assessment and slimming down and cutting content. SATs were henceforth to apply exclusively to the Core subjects of English, maths, and science.[[923]](#footnote-924) Curricula again became less detailed and less prescriptive. The History Advisory Group (HAG) was the body charged with reviewing the history curriculum and reporting back to the SCAA. HAG, like the HWG before it, was bound by the need to produce a document acceptable to the government of the day. Thus, HAG identified areas of ‘non-British history’ as the ‘main targets for cuts’.[[924]](#footnote-925) The result was a curriculum which was between two thirds and three quarters British in focus.[[925]](#footnote-926) These changes focused mainly on primary education; at KS3, the balance between British and world history remained roughly the same as it had been in 1991.

Nevertheless, there were important revisions in emphasis. At KS3, pupils would now study four, rather than five Core Units: ‘The Roman Empire’, a holdover from Baker’s initial guidance to the HWG, was removed entirely.[[926]](#footnote-927) The list of content for other modules was narrowed, sometimes with an attendant change of focus. Most importantly for our purpose, ‘Expansion, Trade and Industry: Britain 1750 to 1900’ was shorn of much of its specified content and redesignated as ‘Britain 1750 to circa 1900’.[[927]](#footnote-928) Surprisingly, only the Supplementary Unit designed to extend the study of British history was cut; the study of a past non-European society remained intact, but the guidance to teachers no longer required it to be taught ‘from a variety of perspectives’. In one crucial way, then, the Dearing Review reprised the emphasis of the HWG’s Interim Report: empire once again disappeared from view. Dearing left the door open for schools to deliver teaching on imperial history, especially in ‘Britain 1750 to circa 1900’, but appeared to decentre its importance as a constitutive force of British modernity. The Review re-enshrined a problematic, binary division between the British past and a (resolutely non-imperial) world history. Whether unwittingly or not, it fostered a vision of the national as ‘our island story’.

McGovern, of Lewes Priory fame, was one of the HAG’s most high profile and controversial members. McGovern remained dissatisfied with the British content of the proposed curriculum. His decision to leak the Group’s workings to the press, accompanied by critical commentary, alienated him from his fellow members.[[928]](#footnote-929) Significantly, McGovern’s opponents included fellow HAG-member Anthony O'Hear, a conservative philosopher often linked to the New Right. The brief media outcry which greeted McGovern’s leak rapidly resolved itself into accepting silence.[[929]](#footnote-930) Once more, it appeared that a consensus position had been reached. The New Right – both within and outside of government – could consider the substantial core of mandatory British history with pride. Those charged with delivering the curriculum, the nation’s teachers, were simply relieved that their burden had been lightened.

The Dearing Review was formally released in 1995, and its changes implemented shortly thereafter. To some extent, the imperial erasure that had characterised many school curricula in the second half of the twentieth century was now given statutory basis. Educators were, of course, *permitted* to teach empire. However, the set curriculum clearly identified it as a matter of secondary importance which could be comfortably excised from the national story. As we will see, the National Curriculum and its accompanying emphasis on discipline and results intentionally narrowed teachers’ room for manoeuvre. Thatcher’s self-expressed desire to curb educational experimentation amongst history teachers would be borne out in the classrooms of the 1990s and early 2000s.[[930]](#footnote-931)

**The Legacy and Impact of the National Curriculum**

The introduction of the National Curriculum heralded a major shift in British political culture. As its contemporaries correctly identified, the legislation was designed to permanently alter the balance of power within state education by transferring decision-making capabilities from teachers to policy makers.[[931]](#footnote-932) This was symptomatic of a broader decline in professional status which made the relationship between government and educators increasingly fraught. The arrival of the National Curriculum, particularly in the chaotic final stages of its creation, normalised direct government intervention in British classrooms. School teaching became subject to national political discussion and centralised policy decisions, in a manner almost unprecedented within the British educational system.

The point is less whether the government of the day chooses to wield this power than the fact that it now exists within the realm of political possibility. Curricula have since become a political volleyball, to be played with at the whim of the government of the day. This analysis applies especially to history, which has obvious resonance for any project of nation-building. Hence, Michael Gove’s controversial curricular experimentation may be traced back in a direct line to 1991.[[932]](#footnote-933) Nevertheless, legislation is inevitably changed in the delivery. This pertains particularly to the complex, sometimes chaotic world of the classroom. Thus, the true significance of the National Curriculum can only be gauged from its reception and implementation. Its content, even after the Dearing Review, was by no means fixed – being subject both to formal, governmental intervention and to imaginative reinterpretation.

Long-term members of the teaching profession, whose careers spanned the introduction of the National Curriculum and successive reforms, have highlighted a gradual reduction of prescription in the years after 1995 (perhaps culminating in the recent academisation process, which has rendered the National Curriculum non-mandatory for many of the nation’s teachers).[[933]](#footnote-934) Linda Turner and Rob Snow, history teachers at King James School, North Yorkshire, remembered the introduction of the National Curriculum as a time of professional strain, produced by an overload of content and assessment. Both reported a sense that they were expected to ‘cram’ in excessive content – especially as pertained to British history.[[934]](#footnote-935) These demands, combined with the massive labour produced by levelling, made the National Curriculum ‘awful to begin with’. ‘After a few years’, however, as legislation was revised and teachers’ attitudes relaxed, it became possible to ‘chop it down to what you wanted’ without provoking intervention.

Similarly, Simon Bishop, a teacher in a Cumbrian comprehensive school, argued that (at the time of interview, in 2010) ‘however you interpret the National Curriculum you probably end up teaching what you want to teach anyway’.[[935]](#footnote-936) John D. Clare, a former Deputy Headteacher, agreed with such arguments, but cautioned against taking the decline in prescription to signify that the National Curriculum was not a major departure for the British educational tradition. Having adapted to the National Curriculum as it existed in the mid-1990s, teachers were sometimes unwilling to break away from its familiar content and framework. As Clare suggested, many classrooms in the early 2010s continued to feature ‘what they set up in 1990’.[[936]](#footnote-937) Thus, decisions made in the initial drafting process of the National Curriculum had long afterlives in the classroom.

The National Curriculum can be viewed as symptomatic of a new era for British teachers, characterised by increased emphasis on the ‘rigour’ of assessment. Writing in 1991, Julie Pearn and Maushumi Roy described fears that the publication of SAT results was feeding a ‘new competitive ethos’ amongst pupils and schools.[[937]](#footnote-938) In conjunction with the government’s emphasis on free parental choice, they anticipated that inter-school competition would contribute to the damaging mythology that schools were fundamentally either ‘good’ or ‘bad’.[[938]](#footnote-939) As the radical educator Chris Searle observed, these developments would disproportionately impact people of colour.[[939]](#footnote-940) In 1992, a new body, the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (OFSTED), was created to appraise and promote educational standards through school inspection. Anecdotal evidence suggested that OFSTED targeted inner-city areas and downwardly racialised headteachers in its initial rounds of school visits.[[940]](#footnote-941) Searle argued that the body held a ‘deficit vision’ of inner-city schools and the communities they served, which deemed schools unable or unwilling to meet centrally imposed curricular, academic, or disciplinary demands. This vision was then confirmed by critical OFSTED reports, which judged schools to be ‘failing’ and sparked external intervention (as we will see, Searle had personal experience of this process). OFSTED thus transferred responsibility from government to communities and teachers, ignoring the reality of a social and educational structure which failed to serve the most deprived communities.

The very public results of inspections enforced a ‘system of market competition and rivalry’ which was increasingly enshrined in the cult of the league table.[[941]](#footnote-942) A judgement of failure risked becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy: to be defined as a ‘bad’ school in the new era of free parental choice could severely impact intake size and the ‘pupil-generated budget’ to which it was correlated.[[942]](#footnote-943) Faced with the pressure of career-defining assessment, teachers were likely to respond with enhanced disciplinary measures – up to and including permanent exclusion. The flip side of the coin was the selection and prioritisation of students most likely to ‘succeed’ under the new metric, who were inevitably those ‘most able to reflect and reproduce pre-approved knowledge’ and behavioural patterns.[[943]](#footnote-944) Students disenfranchised by the system – disproportionately drawn from downwardly racialised backgrounds – would simply disappear or be left behind.

Multicultural and antiracist educators concluded that the competitive ethos of the National Curriculum would reinforce patterns of racial discrimination.[[944]](#footnote-945) Objections also focused on the assimilationist designs of a curriculum which gave statutory status to a specific (and hence limiting) vision of British identity.[[945]](#footnote-946) This was especially the case for history which, as we have seen, bore much of the burden of national self-definition. As such, educators sometimes approached the National Curriculum in history with the intention of subverting the philosophy which lay behind it.

**Radical Contestation and its Limits in the new ERA**

Julia Bush, a multicultural educator based in Northamptonshire, viewed the National Curriculum as an essentially nationalist endeavour, designed to discard the ‘tarnished, no-longer-profitable, imperial past’ and to re-equip school children with an ‘acceptably insular British (possibly European?) outlook for a different era’.[[946]](#footnote-947) Rather than despair, Bush believed that history teachers could rework prescribed units to subvert their ‘complacent’ political message. ATs such as ‘interpretations of history’ and ‘use of historical sources’ offered substantial scope for the study of existing, primary source-based materials which took a critical approach to British national identity and its imperial entanglements. Such work included Bush’s own research on local traces of empire in Northamptonshire, and the resources produced by Sylvia L. Collicott (examined in the previous chapter) on imperial legacies in Haringey, north London.

New materials targeting specific areas of the National Curriculum were still being produced. Bush cited the example of a teaching pack produced by the Sheffield Development Education Centre (SDEC), entitled ‘Colonialism, Slavery and the Industrial Revolution c. 1700—1860: The Empire in South Yorkshire’.[[947]](#footnote-948) Although the pack was designed to support the study of a KS3 Core Unit (‘Britain 1750- circa 1900’) it refused to concede to the logic of the National Curriculum’s framing, which treated empire as a single, marginal ‘dimension’ of the British past.[[948]](#footnote-949) The SDEC instead viewed colonialism as a central pillar of the country’s economic, political and cultural development, which continued to shape present-day experiences of racism and inequality. Bush concluded that those teaching the National Curriculum did not have to reproduce its ideological structures. She acknowledged, however, that the increased workload placed upon teachers limited their capacity to find ‘the time and resources’ to resist.[[949]](#footnote-950)

Teachers were not the only ones capable of contesting the narrative of the National Curriculum. Chapter 3 showed how vocal and opinionated students, especially those from colonised backgrounds, served as educators in their own right. In July 1991, Pearn and Roy produced a study designed to examine the experiences of politically black students in one Sheffield secondary school, on the eve of the introduction of the National Curriculum. It showed that students remained willing to speak out against perceived injustices – including those ingrained in dominant historical narratives. Of the twenty black students interviewed for the study, all agreed that the present curriculum ‘did not reflect their culture or their needs’.[[950]](#footnote-951) Multiple students reported alienation from the British-focused school curriculum and called for greater opportunities to study ‘black history’, ‘history from a black perspective’, or the history of ‘our own countries’. Where attempts were made to teach black history, these were generally regarded as reinforcing a ‘negative image’. Slavery and underdevelopment seemed to be the dominant images associated with b/Blackness.

The study took place in the aftermath of the Gulf War. School policies intended to govern and restrict discussion on the conflict, for example the Headteacher’s ban on listening to the radio news in classrooms, attracted particular criticism.[[951]](#footnote-952) The researchers identified simmering frustration amongst the student-body. One pupil had become ‘so despondent’ about the school’s unresponsiveness that it had ‘negatively affected his work and motivation’. Some black students attempted to step up where they believed the school had failed, for instance by claiming space within their classes to explain their perspectives and to provide information to their peers. The situation within the upper school was eventually identified as ‘explosive’ and senior staff were forced to concede by organising a formal debate. Nevertheless, black pupils seem to have resented the controlled nature of this forum for discussion. Such students’ dedication to narrating history on their own terms – serving as peer educators in the process – implied that the National Curriculum would not go uncontested. Yet the authors feared that the specific needs and desires of black pupils risked being ‘submerged’ under the pressure faced by schools in the new legislative climate. ERA’s potential to generate an authoritarian approach to discipline, racialised in its application, was of particular concern.

The experiences of another Sheffield secondary school, Earl Marshal, emblematised the problem. From Searle’s 1990 appointment as headmaster – in the midst of the National Curriculum debate – the school had embraced an ethos of community service. Earl Marshal was located in Sheffield’s most economically deprived area. Over 80 per cent of pupils were drawn from downwardly racialised communities, many with origins in former British colonies (primarily Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, and the Caribbean).[[952]](#footnote-953) The student body also contained a high proportion of learners of English as an additional language. As such, the school aimed to affirm the ‘experience, history, languages and faiths of its constituents’. The curriculum placed a significant emphasis on language support. ‘Internationalist’, ‘questioning’ perspectives on the National Curriculum’s construction of British identity were woven through the life of the school.[[953]](#footnote-954) Classrooms were adorned with the anti-colonial poster-series *Whose World is the World* (discussed in Chapter 3). Critical discussions of imperialism extended to Earl Marshal’s approach to the Gulf War. By contrast to the caution displayed by other schools in the vicinity, Earl Marshal students were actively encouraged to learn about the conflict.[[954]](#footnote-955)

In 1993, the school published *Lives of Love and Hope: A Sheffield Herstory,* a collection of interviews with local women, transcribed and edited by their own children. The text affirmed the importance of gender, race, and class as categories of historical analysis. It also took a distinctly anti-imperialist tone. Safa Mohammed, a Yemeni student who had been in the UK for less than a year, decided to interview her mother for the project. The result was a women’s history of Yemeni resistance against British colonialism – a struggle in which Mohammed’s father had been blinded, with life-changing implications for his betrothed (Mohammed’s mother), who became a wife and caregiver at just thirteen.[[955]](#footnote-956) The *Herstory* project was one product of Earl Marshal’s significant investment in its locality, which included close involvement with Arabic, Somali and Pakistani supplementary schools.[[956]](#footnote-957)

Community ties also inflected Earl Marshal’s approach to discipline. Searle was cognisant of the disproportionate levels of permanent exclusion experienced by downwardly racialised students, and especially students of African-Caribbean heritage.[[957]](#footnote-958) He did not view the deprivation of educational opportunity, influenced by patterns of racial prejudice, as an acceptable response to pupil misbehaviour (itself too often motivated by disaffection with a system by which the student was marginalised). As such, Searle instituted an alternative provision of work experience and counselling, in dialogue with parental contacts and community centres. It was this refusal to exclude, except as a last resort, which would ultimately be his undoing. Members of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) mobilised to demand the permanent exclusion of a number of pupils, citing the professional and personal strain of disruptive behaviour. The Union contacted local MP and Shadow Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, for support. In February 1994, Blunkett requested that the Sheffield Education Department remove Searle from his post.

Blunkett’s involvement, and Union pressure, were sufficient to precipitate OFSTED intervention. The resulting inspections produced a damning report which reflected a fundamental clash of values. A historic decline in the previous year’s examination results was taken as evidence that Earl Marshal was an academically failing school; in 1995, only six per cent of Earl Marshal students received five or more GCSEs (compared to a national average in excess of forty per cent).[[958]](#footnote-959) This purported failure was linked to the headmaster’s rejection of the educational philosophy of the National Curriculum. Inspectors identified a ‘lack of political balance’ displayed in the school’s teaching and learning environment. Its critical view of the country’s imperial past, as represented by the *Whose World is the World?* posters, was singled out as an example of Earl Marshal’s general ‘bias’ against ‘European and British perspectives on history and “civilisation”’.[[959]](#footnote-960)

The report’s specific references to historical education were representative of the subject’s role as arbiter of national identity within the National Curriculum – a role that Earl Marshal students had been encouraged to question. It was clear that the school’s approach was out of step with the centralising impulses of educational policy. OFSTED, as bearer and enforcer of the logic of the new educational settlement, was making a statement that the embrace of alternatives on a whole-school level would no longer be tolerated. Earl Marshal was placed in ‘special measures’, which entailed ongoing monitoring and the abrogation of the powers of the headmaster and governing board.[[960]](#footnote-961)

Earl Marshal’s wider community rallied to defend Searle and his educational philosophy. The governors argued against the assessment of schools through the ‘distorting mirror of league tables’.[[961]](#footnote-962) They asserted that standardised metrics of educational success began from the unfair premise that all students began with equal opportunities; Earl Marshal should instead be judged on its ability to serve the specific demands of its community. Increasingly, however, it appeared that parents and students were fighting a losing battle. As Mark Whitehead wrote for TES, Searle’s pedagogy was quite simply ‘out of kilter with today’s results-orientated world’ and its disciplinary logic.[[962]](#footnote-963) The direction of student anger against OFSTED inspectors likely only confirmed their critical approach to behaviour.[[963]](#footnote-964) Searle was never reinstated. His replacements gradually brought Earl Marshal into conformity with the structures created by ERA.

In 1997, the incoming Labour government would single Earl Marshal out for central intervention; it became a noted success-story of Blunkett’s ‘fresh start’ scheme, which saw schools closed and reopened on the same site with a ‘new name and new staff’.[[964]](#footnote-965) Fir Vale School, the successor institution, received an ‘Outstanding’ OFSTED rating (the highest possible judgement) in 2002. As Ahmed Gurnah notes, Earl Marshal was just one ‘victim of the Conservative revolution in educational policy’, brought about by, but not restricted to, Thatcher’s government.[[965]](#footnote-966) Searle saw his own case as representative of New Labour policy, which placed the blame for the supposed failures of inner-city comprehensive schools firmly on the shoulders of the ‘old Left’.[[966]](#footnote-967) Tony Blair’s first years in government were marked by the development of a new disciplinary apparatus within the education system, characterised by ‘pupil referral units’ (alternative provision designed to accommodate mass exclusion). Once again, such measures disproportionately impacted downwardly racialised communities.[[967]](#footnote-968)

John Fines, a medievalist and educator who served as President of the HA from 1994 to 1996, has been quoted as saying that the National Curriculum would ‘destroy brilliant history teaching’ but ‘improve the generality’.[[968]](#footnote-969) This prophecy of destruction may have been exaggerated, but it holds a central truth. As the former HWG member Chris Culpin recognised, the introduction of compulsory elements of non-British history (both European and non-European) went ‘far beyond what most schools taught between eleven and fourteen at that time’.[[969]](#footnote-970) However, the National Curriculum was intended to curb (though not to abolish) teacher’s creative autonomy. It was embedded in the competitive, market-driven, and disciplinary framework of ERA. In the classrooms of the 1990s and early 2000s, there was simply less room for the radical experimentation of the kind which had featured in the previous decades, in schools like Tulse Hill. Students challenging the status quo were more likely than ever to be identified as poorly behaved, and to be punished accordingly. When examined through this lens, the taught content of the National Curriculum truly seems to have raised the baseline while limiting the best. Its most devastating effects are likely to have been in the less visible realm of the informal curriculum, by placing restrictions on student freedom to engage with learning – and to participate in peer-education – on their own terms.

# Conclusion: The Imperial History Wars

‘Uncertainties in the present necessarily destabilise our understanding of the past’.[[970]](#footnote-971) **Raphael Samuel, 1989.**

The intense politicisation of school history teaching – of which the National Curriculum was a product, and to which it has contributed – is a consequence of long-term trends in British national culture. As Raphael Samuel has argued, the National Curriculum must be read as a ‘belated recognition’ of the ‘crisis of modernity’ which afflicted the UK in the final decades of the twentieth century.[[971]](#footnote-972) This was a period marked by a decline in confidence in the future and a consonant shift to ideas of ‘conservation and preservation’, as demonstrated by the importance of notions of ‘heritage’. The turn to the past offered a comfortable, certain territory on which the nation could define itself – insulated from the dramatic economic and social changes wrought by decolonisation and deindustrialisation. The act of national self-definition was itself made more urgent by the rise of mass immigration and political devolution to the UK’s constituent nations. History shouldered the weight of such changes. As a school subject, it took on an affective significance which stretched far beyond the classroom. The emotional content of narratives and representations of the national past has not diminished as we move past the first quarter of the twentieth century.[[972]](#footnote-973) Post-colonial Britain is a country which remains ill at ease with itself, its role, and its identity. Historians cannot pretend that our subject is anything other than enmeshed in this search for meaning. It is our duty to take the task seriously, and to offer an account of the past which once again places us in a position to look to the future.

In the summer of 2020, the history of empire was raised to a prominent role in the English public consciousness. BLM drew attention to the imperial legacies of structural racism and systematic inequality. A Bristol protest toppled a statue celebrating the trans-Atlantic slave trader Edward Colston and cast his bronze effigy into the city’s docks. The backlash was swift and powerful.[[973]](#footnote-974) Those attacking the protestors tended to stop short of a straightforward defence of Colston and the ideology of racial hierarchy and domination with which he is associated. Instead, they pleaded for the statue’s retention on the grounds of historical memory. To erase physical traces of the imperial past was, they argued, to somehow censure the past itself. This discourse ignores the obvious distinction between remembrance and celebration. More cynically, it posits anti-racist and anti-colonial movements, especially those led by people of colour, as a threat to history – a claim which flies in the face of such movements’ desire for present-day restitution, based upon knowledge of the history and legacy of imperial violence. Responsibility for the (very real) process of imperial forgetting is shifted onto a group who are both the primary victims and the principal opponents of historical erasure. Ultimately, this represents an assertion of ownership of the imperial past: history is to be narrated when and how the ‘commonsense’ of the White majority (or at least those unimplicated in anti-racist solidarity) see fit. White ownership of the past opens the space both for sustained marginalisation or silencing of imperial histories and for their resurrection as a tool of national self-congratulation.

In the same month as Colston was quite literally removed from his pedestal, a survey was launched to investigate the extent to which British imperial history is currently explored ‘in the curriculum of compulsory education’, across the United Kingdom.[[974]](#footnote-975) The survey’s title, ‘The Impact of Omission’, accurately anticipated its results. It also noted the necessity of accurate understandings of imperial history in forging a path towards justice and reconciliation. Inevitably, framing a study in this manner will both influence the types of respondents attracted and inflect their answers. Nevertheless, the overall picture is too overwhelming to be denied: of the survey’s 56,467 respondents, fewer than ten per cent remembered learning about the role of slavery in the British Industrial Revolution, or about the British colonisation of India. Fewer than eight per cent recalled being taught about the colonisation of Africa. By contrast, 86 per cent of respondents remembered learning about the Tudors.

The findings of ‘The Impact of Omission’ corroborate other studies which have shown that the history of the Tudors and the Second World War – what Peter Mandler has described as ‘Hitler and the Henries’ – exert a stranglehold on the secondary curriculum.[[975]](#footnote-976) In 2011, OFSTED reported that ‘it is a popular and inaccurate myth that students at GCSE and A Level only study Hitler’.[[976]](#footnote-977) However, they conceded that ‘Modern World History’, which usually includes substantial study of the Second World War, dominated exam courses. In 2020, nearly half of all schools following the Edexcel GCSE course chose its ‘Weimar and Nazi Germany’ unit.[[977]](#footnote-978) At A Level, the proportion of pupils studying Nazi Germany has been estimated to be as high as 80 per cent. Meanwhile, a study in 2014 ranked three separate courses on Tudor history amongst the top ten most popular A Level history modules.[[978]](#footnote-979)

These apparently separate trends – the silencing of imperial histories and the rise of ‘Hitler and the Henries’ – are of course interlinked. As we have seen, the imperial retreat of the 1960s engendered a crisis of national self-definition and self-esteem. In this context, concepts of nationhood became progressively narrower: the ‘Greater Britain’ of empire was replaced by an insular notion of ‘little England’. The Tudors factor into this vision as exemplars of a picturesque, self-contained national past (the imperial entanglements of Tudor rule are rarely, if ever, explored).[[979]](#footnote-980) By contrast, the Second World War offers a safe proxy for the imperial discourses of martial pride and heroic national adventure. Both topics present an image of the nation shorn of the constitutive factor of imperialism.

It is my contention that school history teaching in the latter half of the twentieth century devoted only peripheral space to the history of imperialism. The erasure of imperial history has entailed a refusal to face up to the legacies of empire and colonisation. In the absence of a critical treatment of this subject, the ideological structure of empire has been allowed to survive unexamined. As we are seeing today, the national refusal to confront its history perpetuates imperial violence – both in the Global South, and ‘at home’, in the lives of the people of colour whose very presence in the UK is itself an imperial legacy. More generally, an inability to address the question of imperial loss has created a society unable to move on or to define itself in other terms (hence, some have argued, the destructive bids for renewed supremacy which manifest in neo-colonial projects such as the Iraq War, or in the retreat from Europe).[[980]](#footnote-981) It is no surprise, then, that communities of colour have been at the forefront of pushing the nation into a confrontation with its imperial past – both today, and in the period covered by this thesis.

Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the broad outline of history curricula remained relatively consistent: most English secondary schools taught history as a chronological survey with a national core. Nevertheless, there were significant shifts in emphasis within this overarching framework. The changing role of empire within school curricula illuminates broader cultural trends, especially from the 1960s onwards. In the immediate post-war years, empire was taught and celebrated – albeit as an occasional appendage to a domestic, insular national core. In schools, as in the universities, an enduring and problematic connection was established between imperial and *imperialist* history – a connection which would contribute to the sub-discipline’s decline as the popular mood turned away from empire.

The 1960s witnessed a wave of decolonisation which made clear that the British empire was in terminal decline. The former metropole was forced to redefine itself in ‘postcolonial’ terms. National identity pivoted from grandiose visions of imperial destiny to an insular, domestic ‘little Englishness’. This cultural formation was reflected in – and reinforced by – history teaching. Imperial history did not altogether disappear from school curricula. However, the history of the British empire was pushed further to the margins. In late twentieth century English education, the imperial past existed primarily as a ‘pathology of presence’: a set of unnamed, unacknowledged, and unexamined assumptions which were constantly reborn and only rarely identified and contested.

The history teachers of the 1960s experienced intense professional anxieties regarding the status and popularity of their subject. For history to survive as a distinct discipline, they believed that pupils needed to recognise its relevance to a fast-changing world. Advocates of world history envisaged it as a challenge to imperial(ist) history, which viewed foreign peoples and cultures exclusively through British eyes. World history responded to Britain’s loss of global status by decentring the national past. Foreign cultures were to be viewed ‘on their own terms’. Taken to its logical conclusion, the sub-discipline’s distinction between the domestic and the foreign erected a false binary which obscured histories of colonisation, expansion, and migration. By erasing the imperial past, world history enabled its ideological legacies to survive unchecked. The sub-discipline reiterated a liberal imperialist framework of historical analysis, in which the past was understood as a redemptive march towards a glorified, universalizable vision of western modernity. Teaching materials, especially those targeted at younger students, tended to stress the exotic and the picturesque – at the cost of dehumanising and denying agency to non-European peoples.

The 1960s inaugurated changes in teaching style as well as taught content. The ‘new history’, emblematised by the SCHP, valorised student-led historical investigation and independent analysis. Theoretically at least, this had the potential to actively foster critical understandings of taught content. In practice, the pressures of teaching for examination seem to have encouraged ‘talk and chalk’ style lessons with an emphasis on factual content delivered by a singular authority embodied by the teacher. Nevertheless, the inclusion of a substantial coursework component may have opened space for students to take a more reflexive approach to topics including the ‘The Arab-Israeli Conflict’ and ‘The Irish Question’, the imperial connections of which were largely ignored by official course materials.

Students were not simply *given* space to express autonomous or dissenting views in late twentieth century classrooms – they took it. The BEM fostered historical education as a route to self-knowledge and Black political consciousness. Young people within the movement understood history both as a guide to their present realities, and as a weapon by which these realities might be changed. Youth writing historicised systematic racism as a product of Britain’s imperial past and contended with the reality of residing within – and in some sense belonging to – a nation founded on the profits of colonial exploitation. The histories of anti-colonial and anti-racist resistance movements were treated as a repository of inspiration and example. Such movements supplied evidence of the historicity and historical agency of colonised peoples. Young people sought knowledge of themselves as history-makers in their role as historians of past struggles.

The arrival of significant numbers of young people of colour in English classrooms was at first met with a general policy of assimilation. As an important constitutive part of national identity, history was a crucial weapon in the integrationist arsenal. Nevertheless, people of colour demanded recognition of their own historical experiences. Pupils from colonised backgrounds used historical knowledge informed by family and community to problematise the narrative received in school classrooms. Professional associations with an emphasis on racial justice investigated the gaps, silences, and prejudices enshrined in existing curricula.

Many reached a similar conclusion to that outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis: teaching tended to maintain a national focus, narrowly conceived as a domesticated ‘island story’. Where included, the non-European world was represented as a blank canvas painted by White hands. Themes of exploration and discovery prevailed. Insofar as British actions were criticised, colonised peoples were reduced to victims and denied agency, subjectivity, or the capacity to resist. History teaching thus reproduced the silencing mechanisms of imperial rule. Today, campaigners tend to call for imperial history to be placed on school syllabi. Our predecessors were more ambitious in their aspiration for students to engage with a specific *form* of imperial history – that which acknowledged the rich tradition of anti-imperial critique and active resistance.

Unsurprisingly, it was downwardly racialised teachers, and teachers based in areas with a high proportion of students of colour, who pioneered curriculum changes in response to the above criticisms. Interventions can be grouped under three broad categories: Black Studies, multicultural education, and anti-racist education. Though varied in their aims and aspirations (Black empowerment versus cross-cultural understanding; racial justice versus racial harmony) all three stressed the importance of history in changing present realities. This was a period of exciting, radical experimentation in some schools. History curricula such as that at Tulse Hill School, London, placed empire back at the centre of the national story. Both the English state and the English people were conceptualised as products of imperial encounter and imperial violence. Curricula recognised the historical agency of people of colour. Non-European histories were not reduced to colonisation and domination, nor were these processes ignored. Crucially, resistance was placed front and centre.

Not all reforms were created equal. Nor was the reformist impulse universally admired or respected. Many cast doubt on the ability of a systematically racist educational system to reform itself, and on the capacity of simple attitudinal change to enact structural shifts. Black Studies, multicultural education, and anti-racist education were all subject to accusations of co-optation and pacification. Schemes targeted at White students also had a tendency to essentialise and flatten foreign cultures into a timeless, dehistoricised notion of the exotic and ‘Other’. The murder of Ahmed Iqbal Ullah in 1986 revealed that acute racial violence could survive unchecked in an environment allegedly committed to multicultural and anti-racist education. The press furore which followed identified multiculturalism itself as the primary cause of interracial hostility. In this, it was symptomatic of a cultural turn away from the open acknowledgement of racism and discrimination.

The 1980s was marked by fierce conservative backlash against revisions to historical understanding which had taken place in the preceding decades. The New Right sought reassuring certainties in a historical narrative which stressed constitutional and cultural continuity. Empire and its domestic legacies were rehabilitated as part of a unifying national heritage. These escapist fantasies fed on the popular ignorance of empire which had thrived from mid-century onwards. The melancholic desire to resurrect a lapsed ‘golden age’ pertained equally to systems of education as to historical content. In this context, challenges to the ‘great tradition’ of history teaching were presented as symptomatic of a permissive society willingly feeding national decline. The backlash took on the dimension of a moral panic.

The National Curriculum was intended to draw a line under educational experimentation and to restore a unitary, self-confident vision of the national past. In some senses, the curriculum which emerged merely confirmed existing practice. Students were to be taught an evolutionary account of the national past, conceived in this instance as British, rather than English. Alongside the British core, brief forays were to be made into the history of other nations, viewed on their own terms. The liberal-left feared that the inclusion of imperial history would lead to glorification and revival. As such, the debate over empire devolved into a contest between celebration and erasure. Erasure won the day. As the millennium approached, the imperial ‘pathology of presence’ was codified and given statutory basis. My own school experience, which began at the start of the twenty first century, implies that this pathology has inflected the lives of a new generation of students. Our education occurs in a historically unprecedented disciplinary environment, in which dissent attracts serious repercussions.

Throughout much of the twentieth century, the primary impulse for educational change was located within society, not within the state. Teachers, students, families, and community organising all exerted considerable force on school curricula. Since the close of the 1980s, however, the space for such intervention has progressively narrowed. Teachers and students both report unprecedented pressure from an increasingly competitive system which prizes examination results above all else. Students’ racial and class backgrounds, often intertwined, remain key determinants of educational ‘success’ under this system.[[981]](#footnote-982) There is vanishingly little space for education which defies or contests such assumptions.

The problem is compounded by a disciplinary structure which intensified in the years following 9/11 and the 7/7 bombings, when counter-terror policing was brought into classrooms. ‘Prevent Duty’ now obliges schools to cooperate with law-enforcement agencies to identify children who may be vulnerable to radicalisation.[[982]](#footnote-983) It raises worrying questions regarding freedom of speech in education – and has had a ‘chilling’ effect on students’ capacities of self-expression, including in the realm of anti-colonial critique (read, rightly or wrongly, as a threat to the British state). Prevent legislation also mandates that schools promote ‘fundamental British values’: the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. In some ways, this seems the logical culmination of the traditional association of British nationhood with institutional continuity. Of course, it also claims such virtues as an incontestable – and uniquely British – historical legacy.

Despite the seismic educational shifts of the last three decades, those who seek a different future have much to learn from the past. We should be wary of any attempt to identify calls to ‘decolonise’ history as a novel idea. In the absence of the teaching of imperial history, imperial ideology has enjoyed a secure place in school curricula. For as long as it has done so, however, there has been a strong counter current which seeks to present an alternative vision of the past: one which stresses the agency and resistance of colonised peoples, which acknowledges the mutually influential nature of the colonial relationship on colony and metropole, and which situates our present, allegedly ‘post-colonial’, reality in this essential context. As Stuart Hall once noted,

The development of an indigenous British racism in the post-war period *begins* with the profound historical forgetfulness – what I want to call the loss of historical memory, a kind of historical amnesia, a decisive mental repression – which has overtaken the British people about race and empire since the 1950s.[[983]](#footnote-984)

The repression of the imperial past allows its devastating legacies to be abstracted from the ‘internal dynamic’ of British society. To face up to these legacies is to guarantee the nation’s present and future, liberated from the nostalgic gaze of the ‘pathology of presence’.[[984]](#footnote-985) Of course, full historical recognition – and restitution – would also entail a shift towards justice on a global scale. Those of us who consider ourselves teachers would do well to remember the distinction between ‘education’ and ‘schooling’ articulated by young people involved in the Manchester-based *Triangular Minds* project.[[985]](#footnote-986) If the space for anti-colonial voices is narrowing in schools, then it may help to consider opportunities for education beyond their gates. Likewise, if we recognise the structures of formal education as systematically discriminatory, then it is incumbent upon us to conceptualise an anti-racist education which challenges and/or supersedes the present school system.

# Appendices

# Appendix A: The Schools Council History Project Exam Syllabus, as laid out in *A New Look at History* (1976)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Topic** | **Rationale** | **Content (as initially proposed)** |
| 1. ‘Studies in Modern World History’ | ‘It helps to explain their present’. | The Rise of Communist China;  The Move to European Unity;  Arab-Israeli Conflict;  The Irish Question |
| 2. ‘Depth study of some past period’ | ‘It helps them to understand people of a different time and place, and this is a widening and therefore valuable social and educational experience’. | Elizabethan England, 1558-1603;  Britain, 1815-1851;  The American West, 1840-1890 |
| 3. ‘A study in development of some topic’ | ‘It provides material for the understanding of human development and change in the perspective of time and also of the complexity of causation in human affairs’. | History of Medicine |
| 4. ‘History Around Us’ (Fieldwork) | It contributes to leisure interests. | Prehistoric Britain; Roman Britain; Castles and Fortified Houses, 1066-1550; Country Houses 1550- 1800; Church Buildings and Furnishings 1066-1900; Studies in the Making of the Rural Landscape; Town Development and Domestic Architecture 1700 to the present; Industrial Archaeology; Aspects of the Historical Development of the Locality |

# Appendix B: Members of the National Curriculum History Working Group

**Chairman** Commander Michael Saunders Watson DL

**Members**

Mr Robert Guyver (Teacher, Wembury Primary School, Plymouth)

Mr Jim Hendy (Director of Education, Stockport)

Mr Henry Hobhouse (Author, Chairman of Somerset County Council)

Dr Gareth Elwyn Jones (Reader in Education, University College of Wales, Swansea)

Mr Peter Livsey (Adviser for history and geography for County Durham. From 1 February 1989, Senior Education Adviser)

Mrs Ann Low-Beer (Lecturer in the Department of Education, University of Bristol)

Professor Peter Marshall, from 1 July 1989 (Rhodes Professor, Kings College, London)

Dr Alice Prochaska (Secretary and Librarian of the Institute of Historical Research, University of London)

Dr John Roberts, until 30 June 1989 (Warden, Merton College, Oxford)

Mrs Carol White (Head of history, Garth Hill School, Bracknell, Berkshire. From 1 January 1990, General Adviser for History and Social Studies for Humberside)

**Co-opted**

Dr Tim Lomas, from 10 July 1989 (Education Inspector, History, Lincolnshire LEA)

Mr Chris Culpin, from 23 October 1989 (Consultant, Author)

**Observer**

Mr Roger Hennessey (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate)

**Secretariat**

Miss Jenny Worsfold (Secretary)

Miss Cheryl Bailey

Ms Lesley Storey

Miss Susan Webb

Miss Emma John

Mr Phil Snell

Mr John Goodwin

**In attendance**

Mr Anthony Chamier

Mr Barnie Baker

Miss Jenny Baker

Mr Michael Phipps

# Appendix C: Contents of the National Curriculum (Prospective or Confirmed), 1989-1995

**Interim Report of the HWG**

**Key Stage 3**

**British History Study Units:**

*Assigned one term each: total three terms*

The Medieval Realm: c150-1500

The Making of the United Kingdom: Crowns, Parliaments and Peoples 1536-1870

Expansion, Trade and Industry: c1700-1860

**European and World History Study Units:**

*Assigned half a term each: total two terms*

The Roman Empire

Islam and the Arabs: C7th-C15th

The American Revolution

Russia and the USSR: 1917-1945.

**Thematic History Study Units:**

*A choice of three from the following list, assigned half a term each: total one and a half terms*

Castles and Cathedrals: 1066-c1500

The French Revolution and the Napoleonic era

Classical China: from the Han Dynasty to the Mongol Conquest

Japan: Shogunate to the present day

The Italian Renaissance: C14th-C15th

India: C16th to mid-C19th: the Moghul Empire to the East India Company

**Longer-term Thematic History Study Units:**

*A choice of one from the following list, assigned one term:*

Sport and Society

Entertainment and Society

**School Designed Themes:**

*Three, assigned half a term each: total one and a half terms*

One Theme had to be based on local history. A school not wishing to take up the offer of the remaining School Designed Themes could make a selection from the list of Thematic Study Units set out above.

**Key Stage 4**

**British History Study Unit:**

*Two terms assigned for the single unit*

Modern Britain: Politics, Warfare and Social Change

**European and World History Study Units:**

*Two terms assigned, to be shared across the three units*

USA: A World Power

Europe: East Meets West: 1945 to the Present Day

Modernisation, post 1945, of Africa, India, or China

**Thematic History Study Unit:**

*One term assigned, a choice of one from the following:*

The Greek Achievement: The Origins, Impact and Influence of Greek Culture through the Ages

Energy: The Harnessing of Energy and its Social and Economic Effects

**Final Report of the HWG**

**KS3** (three years, nine terms)

**Core Units** (British elements, indicated by \*, recommended to be taught chronologically, one per year)

\*Medieval Realms: c1066 to c1300

\*The Making of the United Kingdom: c1500 to c1750

\*Expansion, Trade and Industry: Britain c1750 to c1900

The Roman Empire

**Options**

A choice of one from each of the following lists but not more than two School Designed History Study Units (SDHSU) to be selected from Lists A to D.

List A:

Castles and Cathedrals: c1066 to c1500

Culture and Society in Ireland up to early C20th

The British Empire at its Zenith: 1877 to 1905

Britain and the Great War: 1914 to 1918

SDHSU which informs and extends the study of the British core HSUs

List B:

Reformation and Religious Diversity in Western Europe in C16th

The Italian Renaissance

The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Era

SDHSU involving the study of a major European turning point before 1914

List C:

Islamic Civilisation up to early C16th

Imperial China: 221BC to the Mongol Conquest 1279AD

India from the Mughal Empire to the Coming of the British: 1526 to 1805

SDHSU involving the study of a non-Western culture from its own perspective.

List D:

Native Peoples of the Americas

Black Peoples of the Americas: C16th to Early C20th

The American Revolution

The American Frontier: c1650 to c1900

SDHSU involving the study of the Americas

**School Designed History Study Unit**

One, long-term in nature, based on British social history

**KS4** (two years, five terms with the expectation that one further term will be spent on exams)

**Core**

Britain in the Twentieth Century

The Era of the Second World War: 1933-1948

**Options**

A choice of one from List A and one from List B

List A:

East and West: Europe 1948 to the Present Day

Russia and the USSR: 1905 to the Present Day

The United States of America: 1917 to the Present Day

List B:

India and Pakistan: 1930 to 1964

Africa South of the Sahara since 1945

Japan: 1868 to the Present Day

China: 1937 to the Present Day

**School Designed History Study Unit**

One, based on revisiting British history, studied over a long time-span (starting at least before 1500 and reaching up to the present day)

***History in the National Curriculum: England* (HMSO, 1991)**

**KS3**

**Core**

The Roman Empire

Medieval Realms: Britain 1066 to 1500

The Making of the United Kingdom: Crowns, Parliaments and Peoples 1500 to 1750

Expansion, Trade and Industry: Britain 1750 to 1900

The Era of the Second World War

**Supplementary**

Three units, one from each of the three categories A, B, and C, to ‘complement or extend the core study units’.

A.) This unit should ‘extend the study of the core British study units for this key stage’. It must relate to the history of the British Isles before 1920 and involve either a ‘study in depth or the study of a theme over a long period of time'.

B.) This unit should involve the study of ‘an episode or turning point in European history before 1914’. It should be based on an episode or turning point of ‘major historical significance’; ‘illustrate links between developments in different parts of Europe’; and examine its short- and long-term implications.

C.) This unit should involve the ‘study of a past non-European society’. It should ‘focus on the key historical issues concerning people of non-European background in a past society in Asia, Africa, America or Australasia’; ‘involve study from a variety of perspectives: political; economic, technological and scientific; religious; cultural and aesthetic’; involve a long-term perspective; and be based on a society or societies different from those studied in KS2.

**KS4**

**Core**

The Development of British Democracy 1900 to circa 20 Years Ago

International Conflict and Co-operation circa 1945 to circa 20 Years Ago

Economic, Social and Cultural Change in Britain, Europe and the World

**Supplementary**

One thematic unit designed to ‘deepen pupils’ understanding of chronology and build on historical studies in earlier key stages’. To be drawn from British history, involve a long time span, pay explicit attention to chronology, compare developments across different periods, and to be based on a key historical theme.

One unit involving a detailed study of the twentieth-century history of a country or region of the world other than Britain, chosen from:

1. Russia and the USSR 1905 to 1964 (from the 1905 Revolution to the fall of Khrushchev)
2. The United States of America 1917 to 1963 (from the entry of the USA into the First World War to the assassination of President Kennedy)
3. The Indian Sub-continent 1914 to 1964 (from the First World War to the death of Nehru)
4. Africa South of the Sahara 1900 to 1963 (from the time of the Boer War to the independence of Kenya)
5. The Middle East 1914 to 1967 (from the First World War to the Six Day Arab-Israeli War)
6. Latin America 1910 to 1962 (from the Mexican Revolution to the Cuba Crisis)
7. Japan 1904 to mid 1960s (from the Russo-Japanese War to the emergence of Japan as a major economic power)
8. China 1911 to 1966 (from the Chinese Revolution to the 'Cultural revolution')

***History in the National Curriculum: England* (HMSO, 1995) i.e. Dearing Review history**

Pupils should be taught all six study units. Units 1, 2, 3 and 4 should be taught in that sequence:

1. Medieval Realms: Britain 1066-1500

2. The Making of the United Kingdom: Crowns, Parliaments and Peoples, 1500-1750

3. Britain 1750- circa 1900

4. The Twentieth Century World

5. An Era or Turning Point in European History Before 1914

6. A Past Non-European Society

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John D. Clare

Kenneth Clarke, QC, MP

Chris Culpin

Patricia Anne Dawson

Roger Hennessey

Peter Marshall

Chris McGovern

Andy Reid

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189. MoE, *Schools and the Commonwealth*, pp.14-15, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
190. G.M.D. Howat, *Notes on Teaching Empire and Commonwealth History* (London: HA, 1967), pp.10-11, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
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192. UCLES, O Level History Question Paper, July 1957, Code 11, pp.79-81 <https://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/1957j-history-olevel-questionpaper.pdf> [accessed 30 January 2025]. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
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197. MoE, *Schools and Commonwealth*, pp.3, 14-15 [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
198. MoE, *Schools and Commonwealth,* p.14. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
199. MoE, *Schools and Commonwealth,* pp.7, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
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207. DES, *Commonwealth in Education,* pp.14, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
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267. In the immensely popular Schools Council History 13-16 Project (‘SCHP’) GCE and CSE curricula, first examined in 1976, all four options for the compulsory ‘Studies in Modern World History’ were based primarily on the post-1945 period. See Ian Dawson, ‘The Schools History Project: A Study in Curriculum Development’, *The History Teacher* 22.3 (1989), 221–38, p.224; SCHP, *A New Look at History*, pp.19-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
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279. Longden, ‘World History in England’, ‘Table 11:3: East Anglia Regional Examining Board History (North): Entries 1966-71’, no page number, (hereafter ‘n.p.’). [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
280. Longden, ‘World History in England’*,* p.255. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
281. Longden, ‘World History in England’*,* p.253. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
282. Longden, ‘World History in England’, p.253. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
283. Longden, ‘World History in England’*,* pp.253-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
284. As Laura Carter argues, the flexibility of CSE Modes II and III allowed teachers to experiment with history as a form of social education for ‘low ability’ pupils. Such courses tended to start from the local and familiar; a mode of British social and economic history which emphasised ‘the history of everyday life’. See Carter, *Histories of Everyday Life,* pp.223-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
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286. Barraclough, *Common Man*, p.9. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
287. Longden, ‘World History in England’*,* p.235. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
288. Longden, ‘World History in England’*,* p.236, ‘Table 10:1: University of London – O Level History Entries 1966-1971’, n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
289. Longden, ‘World History in England’*,* ‘Table 10:2: Associated Examining Board O Level Entries 1964-1971’, n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
290. Longden, ‘World History in England’*,* p.247, ‘Table 10:4: Associated Examining Board A Level Entries in History 1964-1970’, n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
291. Cannadine, Keating, and Sheldon, *The Right Kind*, p.160. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
292. This may have applied equally to those comprehensive schools where rigid streaming resulted in ‘high ability’ classes pursuing GCE qualifications. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
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300. CHTTG, *Teaching of History,* ‘The Enquiry: Its Background and Purpose’, n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
301. CHTTG, *Teaching of History*, pp.45-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
302. CHTTG, *Teaching of History,* p.14. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
303. CHTTG, *Teaching of History,* p.19. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
304. Amey, *World History*, p.i. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
305. Longden, ‘World History in England’*,* pp.215-16, 223, 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
306. Longden, ‘World History in England’*,* pp.238-39; Lyall (ed.), *World Perspective*, p.47. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
307. Lyall (ed.), *World Perspective*, p.10. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
308. Margaret Bryant and Giles Ecclestone, *World Outlook 1900-1965: A Study Series: Class Work Book* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp.196, 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
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524. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, p.278. [↑](#footnote-ref-525)
525. David Edgington, ‘The Role of History in Multi-cultural Education’, *Teaching History* 32 (1982) 3-5, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-526)
526. Edgington, ‘The Role of History in Multi-cultural Education’, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-527)
527. Edgington, *Role of History*, p.15. [↑](#footnote-ref-528)
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533. ‘Techniques of Identifying Racism’ in ACER, *Images and Reflections,* p.43. [↑](#footnote-ref-534)
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561. File and Hinds, ‘World History’, in Straker-Welds (ed.), *Education for a Multicultural Society,* p.87. [↑](#footnote-ref-562)
562. Peter Traves, ‘Humanities in Hackney Downs School’, in Straker-Welds (ed.), *Education for a Multicultural Society,* p.81. [↑](#footnote-ref-563)
563. Sylvia L. Collicott, ‘The Resourceful History Teacher: A look at the Use of History Resources in the Classroom’, *Clio: Anti-Racist Issue* 6.1 (Spring 1986), 1-6, p.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-564)
564. Collicott’s own extensive research into Haringey’s colonial entanglements were published as *Connections: Local-National-World Links* (Haringey Community Information Service and the Multi-Cultural Curriculum Support Group: London, 1986). The research was supported several familiar names, including Len Garrison and Paul McGilchrist (both involved in the BEM via ACER), and Chris Power (formerly of Tulse Hill, later an advisor to Haringey Borough on multiculturalism). [↑](#footnote-ref-565)
565. Transcript of interview with Patricia Anne Dawson, pp.18-19. Interviewed by Dr Nicola Sheldon, 12 April 2010. Institute of Historical Research (IHR): ‘History in Education Project’ (hereafter ‘HiEP’). Transcribed by PageSix Transcription Services. <https://archives.history.ac.uk/history-in-education/browse/interviews/interview-patricia-dawson-12-april-2010.html> [last accessed 12 January 2024]. [↑](#footnote-ref-566)
566. Elyse Dodgson, ‘Drama for a Multicultural Society’, in Straker-Welds (ed.), *Education for a Multicultural Society,* pp.131-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-567)
567. In 1983, Vauxhall Manor would be amalgamated with a local boys’ school to become Lilian Baylis School. Lilian Baylis subsequently developed its own reputation for radical anti-racist educational, attracting the ire of the right-wing press. See ‘Where Pupils Learn Protest’, *Daily Express*, 10 June 1986, p.13. [↑](#footnote-ref-568)
568. Elyse Dodgson, ‘From Oral History to Drama’, *Oral History* 12.2 (1984), 47–53, pp.47-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-569)
569. Dodgson, ‘Drama’, in Straker-Welds (ed.), *Education for a Multicultural Society,* pp.29-30, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-570)
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571. The play is also documented in Marcia Arboine *et al.,* ‘Motherland’, *Ambit* 19 (1982), 26-48; and Elyse Dodgson, ‘From Oral History to Drama’, *Oral History* 12.2 (Autumn 1984), 47-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-572)
572. Caroline Adams, ‘“Navy men”: Lives of Early Bangladeshi Settlers in Britain’, *Clio* 3.1 (Autumn 1982), pp.30-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-573)
573. File and Power, *Black Settlers*, p.92. [↑](#footnote-ref-574)
574. Carter, *Histories of Everyday Life*, pp.237-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-575)
575. The ILEA chastised schools for this form of teaching but failed to make the connection with multi-cultural education. See ILEA, *Race*, *Sex and Class: 3. A Policy for Equality: Race* (London: ILEA, 1983), p.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-576)
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578. Schools Council, *Education for a Multiracial Society*, p.81. [↑](#footnote-ref-579)
579. Barry Troyna, ‘Beyond Multiculturalism: Towards the Enactment of Anti-Racist Education in Policy, Provision and Pedagogy’*, Oxford Review of Education* 13.3 (1987), 307-320, p.318. [↑](#footnote-ref-580)
580. Institute of Race Relations (IRR), *Roots of Racism*: *Book One* (London: IRR, 1982), p.iv (introduction by Ambalavaner Sivanandan). [↑](#footnote-ref-581)
581. IRR, *Roots of Racism*: *Book One*, p.iv*;* Sally Tomlinson, *Ethnic Minorities in British Schools: A Review of the Literature, 1960-1982* (London: Heinemann, 1983)*,* pp.96-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-582)
582. File and Hinds, ‘World History’, in Straker-Welds (ed.), *Education for a Multicultural Society,* p.90. [↑](#footnote-ref-583)
583. IoE: All London Teachers Against Racism and Fascism (‘ALTARF’), *Teaching and Racism: An ALTARF Discussion Document,* 2nd edn (London: ALTARF, 1979), pp.7-8, MF 8/40. [↑](#footnote-ref-584)
584. IRR, *Roots of Racism: Book One,* pp.iv, 21-27. See also IRR, *How Racism Came to Britain: Book Three* (London: IRR, 1985). [↑](#footnote-ref-585)
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587. ILEA, *Race, Sex and Class: 2*, pp.6, 8, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-588)
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591. *Clio: Ethnicity and Culture Issue* 1.4 (Summer 1981); *Clio: Anti-Racist Issue* 6.1 (Spring 1986); Halsall, ‘Whose World is the World’. [↑](#footnote-ref-592)
592. ACD, *History of Racism,* n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-593)
593. ACD, *History of Racism,* n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-594)
594. ACD, *History of Racism,* pp.23-25; IRR, *Patterns of Racism: Book Two* (London: IRR, 1982), pp.25, 35, 36, 41; Schools Council, *Education for a Multiracial Society*, pp.74, 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-595)
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596. Traves, ‘Humanities’, in Straker-Welds (ed.), *Education for a Multicultural Society,* pp.80-81, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-597)
597. ‘Who We Were’, Big Flame: 1970-1984, April 2009 <https://bigflameuk.wordpress.com/about/> [accessed 12 January 2024]. [↑](#footnote-ref-598)
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601. LMA: Frank Green, ‘Why Teach the Holocaust?’, in *Auschwitz: Yesterday’s Racism*, n.p., ILEA/S/LR/10/262. [↑](#footnote-ref-602)
602. LMA: LAEG, ‘About the Pack’, in *Auschwitz: Yesterday’s Racism,* n.p., ILEA/S/LR/10/262. [↑](#footnote-ref-603)
603. LMA: Frank Green, ‘Why Teach the Holocaust?’, in *Auschwitz: Yesterday’s Racism*, n.p., ILEA/S/LR/10/262*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-604)
604. LMA: Shirley Murgraff, *A Teacher’s Guide to the Auschwitz Materials* (London: ILEA Learning Resources Branch, likely 1989), p.3, ILEA/S/LR/10/261. As this implies, the LAEG viewed the Holocaust exclusively as a genocide against the Jewish people, and the persecution of other groups (e.g. the Roma) was largely ignored. [↑](#footnote-ref-605)
605. LMA: Frank Green, ‘Why Teach the Holocaust?’, in *Auschwitz: Yesterday’s Racism*, n.p., ILEA/S/LR/10/262*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-606)
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608. Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp.7, 25; Michael Rothberg ‘Multidirectional Memory’, in *Testimony Between History and Memory* 119 (December 2014), 172-83, p.176. [↑](#footnote-ref-609)
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610. Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory,* p.12. [↑](#footnote-ref-611)
611. Gillian Klein, ‘Race Relations in the School Curriculum: Rationale and Resources’, *Briefing: An Independent Review of Social and Political Trends* 2.9 (November 1983), n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-612)
612. LMA: ‘[Fact Sheet] 7.5: British Collaborators’, in *Auschwitz: Yesterday’s Racism*, ILEA/S/LR/10/262*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-613)
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615. File, ‘History’, in Craft and Bardell (eds), *Curriculum Opportunities,* p.15. [↑](#footnote-ref-616)
616. File, ‘History’, in Craft and Bardell (eds), *Curriculum Opportunities,* p.15. [↑](#footnote-ref-617)
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618. See Gaine, *No Problem Here.* [↑](#footnote-ref-619)
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621. Sarah Marsh, ‘The Top 10 Most Popular History Topics Taught to A-Level Students – In Pictures’, *Guardian*, 13 August 2014,

     <https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/gallery/2014/aug/13/top-10-most-popular-history-topics-alevel-students> [accessed 14 January 2024]. Similarly, an open survey of people who had studied history within the British education system, which gained 56,467 responses, found that no topic with a substantial focus on race and racism ranked in the top seven most studied topics. However, number eight on the list was ‘The Civil Rights Movement’, which 23,790 people claimed to have studied. The study was conducted by the Impact of Omission. Raw and collated data can be downloaded from Impact of Omission, ‘Survey’, 1 March 2021, <https://impactofomission.squarespace.com/survey> [accessed 14 January 2024]. [↑](#footnote-ref-622)
622. Katherine Burn and Richard Harris, *Historical Association Secondary Survey 2021*, pp.2, 19, downloaded from ‘Historical Association Secondary Survey 2021: Annual Survey Report on History in Secondary Schools’, *Historical Association*, 22 October 2021, <https://www.history.org.uk/secondary/categories/409/news/4014/historical-association-secondary-survey-2021> [accessed 14 January 2024]. [↑](#footnote-ref-623)
623. Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race* (London: Bloomsbury Circus, 2017), p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-624)
624. Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, pp.165, 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-625)
625. Paul Goalen, ‘Multiculturalism and the Lower School History Syllabus: Towards a Practical Approach’, *Teaching History* 53 (October 1988), 8-16, p.13. For a related perspective, see Michelle Gordon, ‘Prospects for a Bewältigung of Extreme Violence in Britain’s Imperial Past’, *Modern Languages Open* 1.1 (2020), 1–17. [↑](#footnote-ref-626)
626. Ambalavaner Sivanandan*, Catching History on the Wing: Race, Culture and Globalisation* (London: Pluto, 2008), pp.147-48, 157; Ambalavaner Sivanandan interviewed by Lou Kushnick and Paul Grant for *Against the Odds: Scholars who Challenged Racism in the Twentieth Century*, ‘Catching History on the Wing: A. Sivanandan as Activist, Teacher, Rebel’, 19 March 2001, <https://asivanandan.com/catching-history-on-the-wing-a-sivanandan-as-activist-teacher-and-rebel/> [accessed 15 January 2024]. [↑](#footnote-ref-627)
627. Sivanandan*, Catching History*, p.153. [↑](#footnote-ref-628)
628. DES, *Rampton Report*, p.12. [↑](#footnote-ref-629)
629. The following analysis is indebted to Azfar Shafi and Ilyas Nagdee, *Race to the Bottom: Reclaiming Antiracism* (London: Pluto Press, 2022), especially pp.51, 59, 127-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-630)
630. Sivanandan, *Catching History*, p.146. [↑](#footnote-ref-631)
631. *The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders 10-12 April 1981. Report of an Inquiry by the Right Honourable the Lord Scarman, OBE, Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Home Department by Command of her Majesty November 1981*, 2nd edn, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp.105, 126. The latter assertion - that racism within the force has played a part in influencing its decisions – would subsequently be acknowledged in the Macpherson report, which determined that the Metropolitan Police’s investigation into the death of Stephen Lawrence was ‘marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership’. The former claim has – unsurprisingly – never been acknowledged by the state. See Home Office, *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny*, Cm.4262-I, February 1999, recommendations 12 and 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-632)
632. Sivanandan, *Catching History*, p.144. [↑](#footnote-ref-633)
633. *Scarman Report,* p.27. [↑](#footnote-ref-634)
634. *Scarman Report,* pp.25-26, 29; Sivanandan, *Catching History*, p.144. [↑](#footnote-ref-635)
635. *Scarman Report,* p.28. [↑](#footnote-ref-636)
636. Shafi and Nagdee, *Race to the Bottom*, pp.128-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-637)
637. Sivanandan, *Catching History,* pp.141-42, 156, 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-638)
638. See Shafi and Nagdee, *Race to the Bottom*, pp.75-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-639)
639. Anandi Ramamurthy, *Black Star: Britain’s Asian Youth Movements* (London: Pluto, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-640)
640. See Paul Goalen, ‘Multiculturalism and the Lower School History Syllabus: Towards a Practical Approach’, *Teaching History* 53 (1988), 8-16, p.11. [↑](#footnote-ref-641)
641. Sivanandan, *Catching History*, pp.162-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-642)
642. Chris Gaine, *No Problem Here: A Practical Approach to Education and “Race” in White Schools* (London: Hutchinson Education, 1987), p.97. [↑](#footnote-ref-643)
643. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 3rd edn (London: Penguin, 2017), p.48. [↑](#footnote-ref-644)
644. Schools Council, *Education for a Multiracial Society,* p.9. [↑](#footnote-ref-645)
645. Schools Council, *Education for a Multiracial Society,* pp.66-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-646)
646. Schools Council, *Education for a Multiracial Society,* pp.66-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-647)
647. There was an added interpersonal dimension to their demands: understood the Indian topic as an expression of favouritism towards their Indian classmates, which they linked to broader anxieties about ‘takeover’. [↑](#footnote-ref-648)
648. See ‘Images: Introduction’, Section 6, in ACER, *Images and Reflections*, n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-649)
649. Beverley Naidoo, *Through Whose Eyes? Exploring Racism: Reader, Text and Context* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham, 1992), p.149. [↑](#footnote-ref-650)
650. Mark Puddy, ‘Mixing the Messages...Television *versus* the Teacher’, *Multicultural Teaching* 4.1 (Autumn 1985), 29-30, p.29. [↑](#footnote-ref-651)
651. Schools Council, *Education for a Multiracial Society,* p.85. [↑](#footnote-ref-652)
652. Schools Council, *Children’s Reading Interests, Schools Council Working Paper 52: An Interim Report from the Schools Council Research Project into Children’s Reading Habits, 10-15* (London: Evans/Methuen Educational, 1975), pp.26-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-653)
653. Bob Dixon, *Catching Them Young 2: Political Ideas in Children’s Fiction* (London: Pluto, 1977), p.75. [↑](#footnote-ref-654)
654. W.E. Johns, *Biggles and the Black Raider* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), pp.23-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-655)
655. See Thatcher’s comments in her infamous ‘rather swamped’ speech. Margaret Thatcher, ‘TV Interview for Granada World in Action (“rather swamped”)’, 27 January 1978. Thatcher Archive: Granada Transcript <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103485> [accessed 16 January 2024]. [↑](#footnote-ref-656)
656. Schools Council, *Children’s Reading Interests,* pp.26-30, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-657)
657. Schools Council, *Children’s Reading Interests,* pp.26-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-658)
658. Bill Osgerby, ‘“Bovver” Books of the 1970s: Subcultures, Crisis and “Youth-Sploitation” Novels’, *Contemporary British History* 26.3 (2012), 299-331, p.302. [↑](#footnote-ref-659)
659. Stacey Sinclair, Elizabeth Dunn, and Brian Lowery, ‘The Relationship between Parental Racial Attitudes and Children’s Implicit Prejudice’, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 41.3 (2005), 283–89. [↑](#footnote-ref-660)
660. Schools Council, *Education for a Multiracial Society,* p.66. [↑](#footnote-ref-661)
661. Ian Macdonald *et al.*, *Murder in the Playground: The Burnage Report* (London: Longsight, 1989), pp.ix-x, 82-83, 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-662)
662. Macdonald *et al.*, *Murder in the Playground*, pp.124-25, 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-663)
663. Macdonald *et al.*, *Murder in the Playground,* pp.133, 141-42, 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-664)
664. Macdonald *et al.*, *Murder in the Playground,* pp.140-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-665)
665. Macdonald *et al.*, *Murder in the Playground,* pp.169, 196-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-666)
666. Macdonald *et al.*, *Murder in the Playground,* pp.141-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-667)
667. When the incident was reported to senior management, staff complained of the suppression of free speech and instituted a ‘Censor Free Notice-Board’ where they could make ‘racist or sexist remarks’ without interference. See Macdonald *et al.*, *Murder in the Playground,* p.142. [↑](#footnote-ref-668)
668. Macdonald *et al.*, *Murder in the Playground*, pp.142, 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-669)
669. Macdonald *et al.*, *Murder in the Playground*, pp.112, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-670)
670. Macdonald *et al.*, *Murder in the Playground,* p.102. [↑](#footnote-ref-671)
671. Macdonald *et al.*, *Murder in the Playground,* pp.30, 44-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-672)
672. Macdonald *et al.*, *Murder in the Playground,* pp.30, 46, 98, 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-673)
673. These objections were linked to a more well-founded critique of RAT and its complicity in the elevation of some people of colour into ‘positions of false power’ without empowering the rest of the community. See Macdonald *et al.*, p.348. [↑](#footnote-ref-674)
674. Macdonald *et al.*, *Murder in the Playground,* p.xxiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-675)
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714. ‘Education: Avoidance of Politicisation’, HL Deb (5 February 1986). Vol. 470, col. 1138-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-715)
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724. Oldman, ‘Plain Speaking’, in Troyna (ed.) *Racial Inequality*, p.30. [↑](#footnote-ref-725)
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728. Fred Naylor, *Dewsbury: The School Above the Pub, A Case-Study in Multicultural Education* (London: Claridge, 1989), pp.25-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-729)
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732. Hastie, ‘History, Race and Propaganda’, in Palmer (ed.), *Anti-racism*, p.65. [↑](#footnote-ref-733)
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744. John McBratney, ‘The Raj Is All the Rage: Paul Scott’s *The Raj Quartet* and Colonial Nostalgia’*, North Dakota Quarterly* 55.3 (1987), 204-09, p.204. [↑](#footnote-ref-745)
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749. Reekes, ‘Oral History’, p.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-750)
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763. Robert Skidelsky, ‘Professor Lord Robert Skidelsky (C. 1953-58)’, *Old Brightonians: Brighton College* <https://www.oldbrightonians.com/our-community/notable-obs/politics-law/245-prof-lord-robert-skidelsky.html> [accessed 27 January 2025]. [↑](#footnote-ref-764)
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774. Tomlinson, *Education and Race*, p.112. [↑](#footnote-ref-775)
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793. NAL: ‘Expansion, Trade and Industry: c1700-1860’, n.d., n.p., in ‘National Curriculum: History Working Group; Meeting 13, 29 August-1 September 1989; Minutes and Papers; Proposed Programmes of Study at Key Stage 2’, ED 183/299. [↑](#footnote-ref-794)
794. NAL: ‘Towards a Fleshing out of KS3 POS (Mainly AT1)’, 5 May 1989, in ‘National Curriculum: History Working Group (HWG); Meeting 7, 8-10 May 1989; Minutes and Papers; Paper from HWG Primary Sub Group on Key Stage 1’, ED 183/295. [↑](#footnote-ref-795)
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796. ‘Towards a Fleshing out of KS3 POS’, p.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-797)
797. Satia*, Time’s Monster,* pp.132, 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-798)
798. NAL: ‘Empires - Programme of Study’, 9 May 1989, n.p., in ‘National Curriculum: History Working Group; Meeting 9, 30 May-2 June 1989; Minutes and Papers; Programmes of Study at Key Stage 2’, ED 183/296. [↑](#footnote-ref-799)
799. NAL: ‘Minutes of the Fourteenth Meeting of the National Curriculum History Working Group on 29 September 1989’, n.p., in ‘National Curriculum: History Working Group; Meeting 15, 9-11 October 1989; Minutes and Papers; Proposals for Programmes of Study at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4’, ED 183/301. [↑](#footnote-ref-800)
800. Transcript of interview with Peter Marshall, p.14. [↑](#footnote-ref-801)
801. NAL: ‘Minutes of the First Meeting of the National Curriculum History Working Group on Tuesday 24 January 1989’, n.p., ED 183/293. [↑](#footnote-ref-802)
802. NAL: ‘Letter: Alice Prochaska to Ann Low-Beer’, 5 October 1989, ED 183/301. [↑](#footnote-ref-803)
803. Phillips, *History Teaching*, p .76. [↑](#footnote-ref-804)
804. It would, in fact, go on to be included in Interim Report as ‘Islam and the Arabs: C7th-C15th’ and in the Final Report as ‘Islamic Civilisation up to early C16th’. [↑](#footnote-ref-805)
805. Prochaska, ‘The History Working Group’, p.87. [↑](#footnote-ref-806)
806. Roberts, ‘The Construction of Programmes of Study’, n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-807)
807. Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe*, p.9. [↑](#footnote-ref-808)
808. Roberts, ‘The Construction of Programmes of Study’, n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-809)
809. NAL: ‘Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of the NCHWG on 3-5 April 1989’, n.p., ED 183/294. [↑](#footnote-ref-810)
810. NAL: ‘Chairman's Brief for HWG Meeting on 9-11 October 1989’, n.p., ED 183/301. [↑](#footnote-ref-811)
811. See *Interim Report*. Of the three School Designed Units, two were optional. The third was required to be based upon local history. [↑](#footnote-ref-812)
812. *Interim Report*, p.34. [↑](#footnote-ref-813)
813. *Interim Report,* pp.16-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-814)
814. *Interim Report,* pp.5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-815)
815. *Interim Report,* p.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-816)
816. *Interim Report,* pp.5-6, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-817)
817. *Interim Report*, pp.38-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-818)
818. *Interim Report*, pp.38-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-819)
819. *Interim Report*, p.41. [↑](#footnote-ref-820)
820. Dipo Faloyin*, Africa is Not a Country: Breaking Stereotypes of Modern Africa* (London: Vintage, 2023), p.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-821)
821. Phillips, *History Teaching*, p .76. [↑](#footnote-ref-822)
822. ‘Minutes of the Fifth Meeting’, n.p.; Roberts, ‘The Construction of Programmes of Study’, n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-823)
823. ‘Minutes of the Fifth Meeting’, n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-824)
824. Phillips, *History Teaching*, p.78. [↑](#footnote-ref-825)
825. NAL: Letter from Kenneth Baker to Margret Thatcher, ‘National Curriculum: Interim History Proposals’, 7 July 1989, n.p., in ‘National Curriculum: History Working Group; Interim Report’, ED 183/366. [↑](#footnote-ref-826)
826. NAL: Letter from Margaret Thatcher’s Private Secretary to Kenneth Baker, ‘National Curriculum: Interim History Proposals’, 12 July 1989, n.p., ED 183/366. [↑](#footnote-ref-827)
827. Baker’s correspondence with the Prime Minister and her Private Secretary reveals that his initial response to Thatcher’s critiques was viewed as overly sympathetic to the working group. It was consequently rejected. [↑](#footnote-ref-828)
828. See letter from Commander LMM Saunders Watson DL to the Rt Hon John MacGregor OBE MP, Secretary of State for Education and Science, and the Rt Hon Peter Walker MP, Secretary of State for Wales, 31 January 1990, in *Final Report*, p.i. [↑](#footnote-ref-829)
829. Phillips, *History Teaching*, pp.67-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-830)
830. *Final Report,* p.205. [↑](#footnote-ref-831)
831. Prochaska, ‘The History Working Group’, p.90. [↑](#footnote-ref-832)
832. NAL: Chris Husbands, Robert Medley, and Martin Roberts, ‘Historical Association Response to DES History Working Group’s Interim Report’, 13 October 1989, n.p., ED 183/301. [↑](#footnote-ref-833)
833. Prochaska, ‘The History Working Group’, p.90. [↑](#footnote-ref-834)
834. NAL: ‘National Curriculum History Working Group: History Study Units: State of Play at 20 October 1989’, n.p., in ‘National Curriculum: History Working Group; Meeting 17, 2-3 November 1989; Minutes and Papers; Programmes of Study for the History Study Units’, ED 183/302; NAL: ‘Summary of Responses’, n.d., p.4, in ‘National Curriculum: History Working Group; Meeting 18, 13-15 November 1989; Minutes and Papers; Responses from Educational Bodies to the Interim Report’, ED 183/303. The phrasing of the original document suggests that this number was either figurative (standing in for ‘the vast majority’) or an estimate, rather than the product of precise statistical analysis. [↑](#footnote-ref-835)
835. *Final Report,* p.203. [↑](#footnote-ref-836)
836. ‘History Study Units: State of Play at 20 October 1989’, n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-837)
837. Husbands, Medley, and Roberts, ‘Historical Association Response’, n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-838)
838. NAL: ‘Report of the Responses Group’, n.d., p.2, ED 183/303. [↑](#footnote-ref-839)
839. Husbands, Medley, and Roberts, ‘Historical Association Response’, n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-840)
840. ‘Summary of Responses’, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-841)
841. ‘Report of the Responses Group’, p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-842)
842. ‘Report of the Responses Group’, pp.1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-843)
843. ‘History Study Units: State of Play at 20 October 1989’, n.p. The absence of world history topics from the list may at first seem surprising. However, ‘world’ topics were generally better represented than ‘European’ topics in the Interim Report. Additionally, ‘world’ topics were a common part of multicultural and anti-racist curricula, which were typically responsive to local demand and highly individualised. Thus, it is likely that there was little consensus and concerted advocacy on specific topics which fell under this umbrella. [↑](#footnote-ref-844)
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845. Transcript of interview with Peter Marshall, p.9. [↑](#footnote-ref-846)
846. Robert M. Guyver, ‘History’s Domesday Book’, *History Workshop Journal* 30 (Autumn 1990), 100-08, p.105. [↑](#footnote-ref-847)
847. ‘Report of the Responses Group’, p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-848)
848. See Lucy Russell, ‘Teaching the Holocaust in History: Policy and Classroom Perspectives’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London), pp.164-65; and NAL: Roger Hennessey, ‘Towards a Rationale for the Selection of HSUs: Agenda’, 26 September 1989, in ‘National Curriculum: History Working Group; Meeting 14, 29 September 1989; Minutes and Papers; Proposals for Programmes of Study at Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4’, ED 183/300. [↑](#footnote-ref-849)
849. ‘Report of the Responses Group’, p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-850)
850. Transcript of interview with Peter Marshall, p.9. [↑](#footnote-ref-851)
851. Quoted in Russell, ‘Teaching the Holocaust’, pp.165-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-852)
852. Transcript of interview with Peter Marshall, p.9. [↑](#footnote-ref-853)
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857. Gilroy*, After Empire,* pp.95-96. [↑](#footnote-ref-858)
858. Transcript of interview with Peter Marshall, p.9. [↑](#footnote-ref-859)
859. ‘History’, HC Deb (14 November 1989). Vol. 160, col.172. [↑](#footnote-ref-860)
860. Russell, ‘Teaching the Holocaust’, p.11. [↑](#footnote-ref-861)
861. Phillips, *History Teaching*, pp.79-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-862)
862. *Final Report,* pp.22-24, 26-30, 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-863)
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865. *Final Report,* pp.16-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-866)
866. *Final Report,* pp.70-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-867)
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868. Phillips, *History Teaching*, p.81. [↑](#footnote-ref-869)
869. *Final Report*, p.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-870)
870. *Final Report*, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-871)
871. *Final Report*, pp.13-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-872)
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882. Roberts, ‘Education Forum’, p.13. [↑](#footnote-ref-883)
883. ‘Editorial: The Professionals’, *The Historian* 28 (Autumn 1990), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-884)
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885. Roberts, ‘Education Forum’, p.13. [↑](#footnote-ref-886)
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893. NAL: ‘The Consultation Exercise’, n.d., n.p., ED 183/370. [↑](#footnote-ref-894)
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897. Transcript of interview with Peter Marshall, pp.20, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-898)
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941. Chris Searle*, An Exclusive Education: Race, Class and Exclusion in British Schools* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2001), pp.148-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-942)
942. Searle, ‘OFSTEDed, Blunketted and Permanently Excluded’, pp.29, 30, 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-943)
943. Ahmed Gurnah, ‘Earl Marshal School: Towards an Inclusive Education’, *Race & Class* 51.2(2009), 92–103, p.95. [↑](#footnote-ref-944)
944. Some, but not all, of these fears have been confirmed in subsequent decades. Figures on exam performance show wide attainment gaps between various downwardly racialised communities: while Indian and Chinese pupils outperform their White peers, the 2016-2017 GCSE grades data show that Black Caribbean, Pakistani and Gypsy and Irish Traveller pupils are the least likely to achieve A\* to C grades in maths and English. Likewise, the data points towards a disproportionately high rate of permanent exclusion and placement in pupil referral units amongst Black and Gypsy and Traveller pupils. For Muslim students in particular, Prevent represents an additional disciplinary mechanism which limits freedom of expression in classroom settings. These themes will be elaborated in the Conclusion. See Claire Alexander and William Shankley, ‘Ethnic Inequalities in the State Education System in England’, in Bridget Byrne *et al.*, *Ethnicity, Race and Inequality in the UK: State of the Nation* (Bristol: Policy, 2020), 93-125, pp.93-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-945)
945. See Sylvia L. Collicott, ‘Who Is the National History Curriculum For?’, *Teaching History* 61 (1990), 8–12. [↑](#footnote-ref-946)
946. Bush, ‘Moving On’, pp.192-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-947)
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949. Bush, ‘Moving On’, p.193. [↑](#footnote-ref-950)
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951. Pearn and Roy, *E.R.A. and the Black Child*, pp.1, 2,13. [↑](#footnote-ref-952)
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953. Searle, ‘OFSTEDed, Blunketted and Permanently Excluded’, pp.23, 24, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-954)
954. Davis, ‘Going in by the Front Door’, p.82. [↑](#footnote-ref-955)
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956. Gurnah, ‘Earl Marshal School’, pp.101, 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-957)
957. Gurnah, ‘Earl Marshal School’, p.98; Searle, ‘OFSTEDed, Blunketted and Permanently Excluded’, pp.26, 27, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-958)
958. Searle accepted that the results were not good enough. However, the notion that this was a general pattern, or that results were significantly out of step with other schools drawing on similar demographic bases, was contested by the headmaster and his supporters. See Fran Abrams, 'Sacked Radical Head Doomed to Repeat the Lessons of History’, *Independent*, 31 December 1995 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sacked-radical-head-doomed-to-repeat-the-lessons-of-history-1527916.html> [last accessed 20 January 2025]; Searle, ‘OFSTEDed, Blunketted and Permanently Excluded’, p.24. [↑](#footnote-ref-959)
959. Searle, ‘OFSTEDed, Blunketted and Permanently Excluded’, p.30. [↑](#footnote-ref-960)
960. Gurnah, ‘Earl Marshal School’, p.101. [↑](#footnote-ref-961)
961. Searle, ‘OFSTEDed, Blunketted and Permanently Excluded’, pp.32-33 [↑](#footnote-ref-962)
962. Mark Whitehead, ‘Results are Not Ideal’, *TES*, 27 June 1997 <https://www.tes.com/magazine/archive/results-are-not-ideal> [last accessed 20 January 2025]. [↑](#footnote-ref-963)
963. Searle, ‘OFSTEDed, Blunketted and Permanently Excluded’, p.35. [↑](#footnote-ref-964)
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966. Searle, ‘OFSTEDed, Blunketted and Permanently Excluded’, p.36. [↑](#footnote-ref-967)
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971. Samuel, ‘The Return of History’. [↑](#footnote-ref-972)
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