Forever in the Shadow of Churchill?:
Britain and the Memory of World War Two at the End of the
Twentieth Century

By

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CONTENTS

Summary

Brief Notes on Interviewees

Part One:
A Reputation Ripe For Revision? Reappraising Churchill

The Charmley/Clark Controversy
A Deal with Hitler?
The Debunking of History
The Revisionist Historians
The Verdict on Churchill

Part Two:
The Sins of the Fathers: British Historians and the Memory of Germany's Past

The Flick Affair, “Hitler's Willing Executioners” and the Memory of the Holocaust
Dresden, Moral Equivalence and the Unification of European History
“The German Question”: Germany, The European Union and British Fears

Conclusion
SUMMARY

This paper examines recent debates in Britain surrounding the memory of the Second World War. Part one is an examination of the controversy sparked by the publication in 1993 of John Charmley’s *Churchill: The End of Glory*, and Alan Clark’s article in *The Times*, “A Reputation Ripe for Revision?”

Part two explores how British historians have responded to the debates over the Flick donation to Oxford University, Daniel Goldhagen’s book *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, and the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing of Dresden. Part two also surveys how the British government, media, public and historians are reacting to German proposals for greater European integration.

This paper is based upon interviews with several leading British historians and political commentators, together with contemporary British and American newspaper and magazine reports, editorials and opinion polls.
BRIEF NOTES ON INTERVIEWEES

Correlli Barnett

Christopher Booker

John Charmley

Lord Dacre of Glanton (Hugh Trevor-Roper)
Regius Professor of Modern History, Oxford University, 1957-80. Director of Times Newspapers Limited, 1974-88. Editor of Hitler’s Table Talk, Hitler’s War Directives, 1939-45, The Goebbels Diaries, and The Last Days of Hitler.

Alistair Horne

Sir Michael Howard

John Keegan
Andrew Roberts

William Roger Louis

Norman Stone
Professor of Modern History at Oxford University and Trustee of the Thatcher Foundation. Author of The Eastern Front, 1914-1917, Hitler, and Europe Transformed, 1878-1919.

Count Nikolai Tolstoy
Author of The Victims of Yalta, Stalin’s Secret War, and The Minister and the Massacre.
PART I
A REPUTATION RIPE FOR REVISION?
REAPPRAISING CHURCHILL

The Charmley/Clark Controversy

In the summer of 1940 Churchill's vision and the ghost of Britain's faded grandeur met for one last moment of glory; after that the twilight fell. At the end it was a melancholy story which emerged. There was nothing to be done by 1945, but action earlier might have averted the worst. At the end of the day there were no “sun-lit uplands,” only a “darkling plain” where “ignorant armies clash by night.” In the long story of British decline the part played by a failure of leadership has yet to be properly told, but that there was such a failure is hardly in doubt. Churchill's leadership was inspiring, but at the end it was barren, it led nowhere, and there were no heirs to his tradition.¹

This was the introduction to John Charmley's controversial work, *Churchill: The End of Glory*, described as "probably the most important revisionist text to be published since the war." Charmley's book argues that Winston Churchill's leadership left Britain as an impoverished debtor to the Americans, with her Empire preserved but seriously undermined. In Europe, Churchill had defeated Hitler only to see Nazism replaced with the Stalinist domination of Eastern Europe. At home, Churchill had allowed the socialists to mastermind domestic policy and begin the implementation of a destructive welfare state.

A controversial pre-publication review in *The Times* of Charmley’s book by Alan Clark, an outspoken former defense minister and military historian,⁴ ensured that the book was propelled into the public arena, in Britain, Germany and in the United States. Clark’s article in *The Times* was less a review of Charmley’s book than a highly provocative polemic which argued that Churchill should have made peace with Hitler in April 1941:

There were several occasions when a rational leader could have got, first reasonable, then excellent, terms from Germany. Hitler actually offered peace in July 1940 before the Battle of Britain started. After the RAF victory the German terms were still available, now weighted more in Britain's favour. In spring 1941, following the total defeat of the Italians in Africa, Britain had recovered its military poise and not yet paid over all its gold reserves to America. Hitler wanted to secure his flank before he turned on Russia. Hess, his deputy, flew uninvited to Britain with his terms. Churchill who saw the domestic dangers, would not talk to him, and repressed (in conspiracy with the whole establishment) the documents. This was the real watershed, because if Britain had made peace in April 1941 the fleet and the Spitfires could have been moved to Singapore. The Japanese would never have attacked and the Far Eastern Empire would have endured.⁵
While Clark and Charmley are in agreement over what they see as the sterile legacy of Churchill’s leadership, Charmley’s book does not explicitly make the claim that Churchill should have made peace with Hitler during the war. It is essentially a study of the reasons for British decline and not a manifesto decrying a “lost peace.” Charmley in fact deliberately avoided the 1940/41 surrender issue in his book. Nevertheless, the book succeeded, intentionally or not, in giving critics the impression that the Second World War should never have been fought at all.

The advance publicity for Churchill: The End of Glory generated by Clark’s review helped ensure that the book sold out on its first day of release. It was swiftly followed by a barrage of condemnation, on both historical and moral grounds, parried by smaller rounds of praise from less angered historians. The ideas of Charmley and Clark were frequently lumped together in what became known as the “Charmley/Clark” thesis. The result was one of the liveliest and most significant British historical debates in recent years. At stake was the reputation of an icon in British history, whose wartime record had never seriously been challenged before.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. described the debate over Charmley’s book as "a British version of the Historikerstreit." Perhaps it was more of a skirmish than a full-blown battle in comparison with the German conflict over the uniqueness of the Holocaust, but it nevertheless had its fair share of moral indignation. "Morally sickening" was the verdict of Yale professor Gaddis Smith:

Mr. Charmley’s argument that Churchill’s determination to destroy Hitler was suicidal folly mocks the moral code that has informed democratic nations’ foreign policy since 1939 and raises uncomfortable questions about whether distinctions between good and evil have any meaning at all. . . .

Unfortunate parallels were made between the views of Alan Clark and John Charmley and those of Holocaust denialist David Irving. "The difference between John Charmley and David Irving may be a difference of degree; it is not a difference in kind," wrote John Lukacs in The Washington Post. Winston Churchill M.P., grandson of the war leader, attacked what he termed "the hounds of historic reappraisal" whom he compared to the Holocaust revisionists: "instead of revising evil morally upwards, they are attempting to pull good downwards."

In a provocative article in The International History Review, Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson referred to "historical revisionism in its `Clark-Charmley-Irving' form. In another article, Charmley is quoted as being a "Mosleyite," "a house-trained David Irving."

A Deal with Hitler?
What would have been the consequences of a deal with Hitler? What would have been the implications for Britain if she had continued the appeasement policies of Chamberlain? Lord Dacre believes the Alan Clark thesis
to be "a worthless argument." Hitler, he points out, made no less than 13 major treaties in his lifetime, all of which were broken. With Hitler negotiating from strength, Britain would have had to disarm and demobilize. Having contracted out of the war, Britain would have left Europe to the whims of Hitler, with the dictator as master of the continent. The long-term consequences for the British would have been dire.\(^{14}\) A British pact with Hitler, notes Professor Norman Stone, would have made him master of Eurasia, with Britain "a huge Guernsey ruled in the manner of Vichy."\(^{15}\)

While supporting Clark's right to raise the "lost peace" issue, Andrew Roberts, a revisionist historian of the Churchill era, believes that a deal with Hitler would have taken Britain back into the early nineteenth century:

I just don't believe that the British Empire or indeed the civilised world would have been in a better shape in 1942 and onwards had we made peace with Hitler in 1941, which is what Alan Clark is suggesting. I think it would have made the defeat of the Soviet Union more likely and had that happened we would be faced with a Germany stretching from Brest to the Urals and from Norway to North Africa. It would be a far worse situation even than in the early 19th Century when we were facing the continental system of Napoleon. Certainly before the Americans came into the war it would have been disastrous for the British to have made an early peace.\(^{16}\)

Sir Michael Howard argues that the suggestion that Churchill should have made peace with Hitler in 1941, following the defeat of the Italians, "does not stand up to serious criticism." Clark ignores the immense level of anti-Hitler and pro-Russian public opinion in Britain at the time, which would have led to Churchill being thrown out of office. While sympathetic to Charmley's view that there needs to be far more debate about the subject of Churchill and appeasement, Howard believes that Charmley "has fallen into exactly the same trap that Chamberlain did - that is to say that Hitler was a rational statesman with whom one could do business."\(^{17}\)
The Debunking of History

The revisionist attack on Churchill by Charmley and Clark needs to be viewed within the wider context of British revisionist history in the twentieth century. Lytton Strachey started the trend back in the 1920s with *Eminent Victorians*. The turning point was the First World War and its revolutionary impact on society. As Sir Michael Howard states, "I don't see that there's anything really new about what has been going on over the past couple of decades."

It is hard to think of any serious work glorifying Britain's past that has been published in the last 50 or 60 years, and such works as there have been such as Arthur Bryant's have been almost sidelined and not taken very seriously.  

Alongside Churchill stands an exceedingly long line of historical figures who have recently been “debunked” or knocked off their pedestals. Among them are Lord Baden-Powell, Florence Nightingale, Cecil Rhodes, Earl Haig, Edward VIII and Arthur “Bomber” Harris - the list is endless. Almost every major figure of modern British history has been the subject of critical analysis and disturbing “revelations,” some of them accurate, others scurrilous. Former Labour politician Roy Hattersley has appropriately described the 1990s as "an age of fallen idols" where "pigmies find it painful to admit that giants once walked the land."  

What is significant about the assault on Churchill's reputation is the extraordinarily vociferous academic and public outcry which has greeted it. Churchill is perhaps the last great icon of twentieth century British history; his popularity is even greater outside Britain, especially in the United States. He is a particularly tempting target for historians looking for alternative reasons for British decline. The appeasers of the 1930s have long had their come-uppance, as have the “Imperial Edwardians” ridiculed by Correlli Barnett. The “New Jerusalem” of the post-war Labour government has also come under intense fire. It is inevitable that attention will shift to the war-time period itself and its leaders for new answers to twentieth century decline.  

Churchillian revisionism dates back to 1970 with the publication of Robert Rhodes James, *Churchill: A Study in Failure, 1900-1939,* which focused on Churchill’s early political career. It was not until the 1990s though, that Churchill's wartime and post-war record itself came under heavy fire. Charmley's *Churchill: The End of Glory* was accompanied by two other revisionist works, Andrew Roberts’ *Eminent Churchillians*, and Clive Ponting’s deeply flawed *Churchill.*  

*Eminent Churchillians*, although undoubtedly an important revisionist text, was less a critique of Churchill himself than a savaging of some of the “toadies” who clung to his coat tails, among them Earl Mountbatten and Sir Arthur Bryant. In contrast to Charmley’s *Churchill: The End of Glory*, the villain of Roberts’ work is not Churchill but the left-wing elements within the Tory Party, Monarchy,
Trade Unions and historical establishment who impeded the war effort, built up a welfare state and threw away the Empire. The only element of the book damaging to Churchill's reputation was the chapter on Churchill's somewhat old-fashioned views on race, serialized in *The Spectator*. Churchill, Roberts revealed, "was a convinced racist" and "Anglo-Saxon-supremacist." "For such a zealous child of the Empire," wrote Roberts, "anything else would have been astonishing." While he believed the Jews to be "the most formidable and the most remarkable race which has ever appeared in the world," Churchill's views on other races were less laudatory:

For Churchill, Negroes were “niggers” or “blackamoors,” Arabs were “worthless,” Chinese were “chinks” or “pig-tails,” and other black races were “baboons” or “Hottentots.” Italians were “mere organ-grinders,” and when an Egyptian crowd attempted to burn down Shepherd's Hotel in 1952 he described them in a memorandum to Eden as “lower than the most degraded savages ever known.” . . . Indians, on the other hand, he found “the beastliest people in the world, next to the Germans.” During the 1943 Bengal famine he reassured the Secretary of State for India, Leo Amery, that the Indians would nevertheless continue to breed “like rabbits.”

Ironically, despite Churchill's description of Gandhi as "a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now passing as a fakir of a type well known in the East," the first to leap to Churchill's defense after the publication of Roberts' article were Indian scholars, including Nirad Chaudhuri, Radhakrishnan Nayar and Bhiku Parekh. Nayar argues that "Churchill had moral conceptions which transcended race. He was above all a warrior, and possessed a warrior's sense of honour. . . . Churchill only gave expression to the ruling philosophy of his age; as always he expressed it more vividly. To 'discover' he was a racist is rather like discovering the Pope is a Catholic.

Roberts denies that *Eminent Churchillians* is an attempt to tear down the reputation of Churchill. Roberts believes the practice of “debunking” to be "an extremely disturbing and dangerous trend":

A nation is partly defined by its heroes and heroines. In ancient Greece you could be condemned to death for slandering the gods and heroes of the cities. The heroes were as important almost as the Gods - it would be very bad for the British nation were we to go down this route of the smearing of everybody.

**The Revisionist Historians**

Roberts responds to accusations made by David Cannadine and other critics that the revisionists are simply looking for sacrificial lambs to feed "a deep resentment at Britain's decline," by arguing that it is not "a question of scapegoats, it's a question of looking for answers." Young revisionist historians such as Roberts and Charmley are still in their thirties and early forties, born over a decade after the end of the Second World War. Theirs is a different
generation to that of the older Second World War historians, including Lord Dacre, Sir Michael Howard, Lord Bullock and Donald Cameron Watt. They are children of the Thatcher revolution in Britain, which had brought with it a greater sense of national pride, a hostility towards socialist thought and the utopian ideals of the European Union, and a re-examination of the causes of twentieth century British decline.

To the young revisionists, Churchill is less a national icon than just another historical figure from a bygone era. "It never occurred to me that Churchill should not be treated in a way that I would have treated any other historical character," notes Charmley.28 Roberts observes that "we are looking at Churchill the same way as we would look at Frederick the Great."29 Professor Norman Stone believes that the revisionist assault on Churchill's reputation will gather momentum in the years to come. Stone argues that "all the newer historians are doing is taking a blowtorch to an iceberg."30

The new revisionism is also a reaction against the prominence in recent years of social and class analysis in British history, which has downplayed the significance of key historical figures as the driving force in history. Charmley's book arose from his belief that above all other factors "people matter in history. It mattered fundamentally whether Churchill was there or not in 1940." Charmley argues that modern historiography has become increasingly remote from the educated lay public, and "if history is not careful it will end up exactly where the Classics ended up a couple of generations ago - totally dead, except kept alive on artificial support machines in universities."31 Charmley believes that the current liberal intellectual climate on British campuses has been highly conducive to the rise of revisionist thought. He quotes from a letter by Lord Salisbury to Anthony Eden written during the “winds of change” debates: "I'm told by mariners that inevitably those who sail with the wind end up on the rocks." According to Charmley:

New thinking always comes from people prepared to dissent with orthodoxy. Despite over a decade of Thatcherism, the prevailing orthodoxy in British intellectual life remains firmly left of centre. And there is nothing more conducive to intellectual lethargy than consensus. . . In a climate where intellectually the prevailing one is left of centre, it doesn't surprise me that the only fresh thinking is going to come from the Right. . . In academic life you can be a lazy liberal, I don’t think you can really be a lazy conservative.32

Another significant factor in the revisionist approach to Churchill is a nostalgia for the British Empire and an attempt to understand the reasons for the transformation of Britain from a great imperial power into a diminished power on the world stage, stripped of the vestiges of Empire. Sir Michael Howard believes it is a combination of nostalgia, resentment and regret which fuels current revisionist thinking:

Oddly enough it’s something felt on the whole by a younger generation rather than a generation like my own which ruled the Empire, grew up
with it and then let it go. There is perhaps among the younger generation a resentment that their heritage should have been so lightly squandered. The complacency with which my own generation let it go I think arose from the realization we couldn't keep it. There was just no way in which we could hang on to it.\textsuperscript{33}

Howard points out that there was a sudden collapse of will and loss of nerve after the traumatic shock of Suez. Within less than a decade everything came tumbling down. Younger historians looking back over the ruins ask whether this was this really necessary - did it have to go like that? There is a realization that a great deal of good was lost in the process.\textsuperscript{34} "When I look at our country", says Andrew Roberts, "I see so much glorious past behind us and so little to look forward to."\textsuperscript{35}

As Britain heads towards the new millennium there are signs of a renewed interest in Britain's imperial past. The past few years have seen the publication of several important reappraisals of the imperial experience, among them Lawrence James' best-selling book \textit{The Rise and Fall of the British Empire}, which portrayed the Empire in a favorable light. The British Empire continues to provoke heated discussion. In 1995 Lord Beloff, Emeritus Professor of Government and Public Administration at Oxford, publicly criticized what he perceived to be the Americanization of the forthcoming \textit{Oxford History of the British Empire}. Addressing the annual Anglo-American Conference of Historians, Beloff warned against a "politically correct" approach to the writing of British imperial history, noting that "the self-evident truths of one people are not the necessary assumptions of the other." In one of the most important speeches on the history of the British Empire since the 1960s, Beloff condemned the appalling post-independence records of many of Britain's former territories in Africa and Asia, and asked: "Does anyone maintain that Burma or the Sudan are better off now than when they were part of the British Empire?"\textsuperscript{36}

Several months earlier, military historian John Keegan had argued the case for a "new colonialism." "What are we to do about the disorder in the old colonial world?" asked Keegan in \textit{The Daily Telegraph} at the height of the ethnic conflict between Hutus and Tutsis in the former Belgian colony of Rwanda/Burundi:

Bloodshed and oppression in what were once the white empires is now a major affront to opinion in the countries that created them. Can it be brought to an end? . . . Empire was better for the Rwandans than independence. Should we be looking towards some reversal of decolonisation?\textsuperscript{37}

It is within the context of the contemporary debates over the British Empire that the writings of revisionist historians such as John Charmley, Alan Clark and Andrew Roberts need to be viewed. While the overt anti-Churchill stance of Charmley and Clark sits uncomfortably with the pro-Churchill views of most pro-Empire historians such as Beloff and Keegan, they find common
ground in the view that the Empire was a “good thing” which has been replaced by despotism, corruption, poverty and widespread inter-tribal warfare.

A sense of nostalgia for a lost Empire, ironically more powerfully expressed by the post-war generation, is keenly felt across the generational divide, uniting younger historians such as Charmley with more seasoned veterans such as Clark. Roberts though, rejects the strong anti-American sentiments of Charmley and Clark who believe that the Americans were instrumental in the dismantling of the British Empire, both during and after the war. In the words of Clark "a grievous ransom paid in blood and treasure" had been handed over by Churchill to the Americans in order to pay for the war effort. America, Charmley argues, "has used her power ruthlessly to help dismantle the British Empire, both by direct action as at the time of Suez, and by indirect action through the United Nations and the encouragement of every nationalist rabble rouser who shouted loud enough."

Sir Michael Howard believes that Charmley’s view that Churchill was a romantic who had little understanding of the balance of power is not tenable. Churchill realized that the Americans were the “only show in town.” Being half-American himself he had a far greater appreciation of the United States emerging as the future global power. Churchill’s policy was in fact a piece of brilliant realpolitik which attracted the support of the United States. Further, as William Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson recently illustrated, the Anglo-American relationship buttressed, rather than weakened, the British Empire (Suez apart) in the post-war period.
The Verdict on Churchill

The debates over Winston Churchill sparked by John Charmley’s *Churchill: The End of Glory* and Alan Clark’s article “A Reputation Ripe for Revision” have been thought-provoking, challenging and to some, disturbing. They have touched upon sensitive questions which have received little attention from leading historians over the past decades. Should Britain have gone to war with Germany in 1939? Should a deal have been struck with Hitler in 1941? Could Churchill have preserved the Empire he so deeply loved?

The overwhelming response from most British historians to these questions has been an emphatic “no.” Perhaps the reasons against the arguments of Charmley and Clark are most provocatively expressed by John Keegan in his review of *Churchill: The End of Glory* in *The Daily Telegraph*:

As it is, we have modestly rebuilt our fortune. We are now, after Japan, the second richest creditor nation in the world. Most of all we have retained our self-respect and, given our diminished status, a surprising degree of respect among nations - including the United States (where the Churchill cult is much stronger than here). A negotiated peace in 1940 would have compromised our good name forever. True, we lost our empire, but its loss was predestined. France lost its empire, much of its good name as well and now measures its success in the world by the degree to which it enjoys Germany’s favor. It has us - but Churchill most of all - to thank that the “Europe” of which it makes so much has not, for the past 50 years, been ruled from Berlin.43

Nevertheless, many historians, including Keegan, have acknowledged the significance of Charmley’s book, and have welcomed its contribution to historical debate. Robert Skidelsky has described *Churchill: The End of Glory* as "the most absorbing study of Churchill’s career ever written, a brilliant picture of the fissures in twentieth-century British conservatism, and an acute analysis of the dilemmas facing British foreign policy in Britain’s period of decline."44 Sir Michael Howard believes the ideas of Charmley and Clark to be important and necessary contributions to historical discussion:

Revisionist history is inevitable and proper and it would be appalling if it didn’t exist. Views about the past get set in concrete and become unquestioned. It is the job of all historians to approach the past with a sceptical open mind and mistrust the conventional wisdom. It is an ongoing but necessary process for every single generation. And although I do have strong and probably usually conservative views on all these issues I think it’s an extremely good thing that people like Charmley and others have stirred it up and made the conventional the examining of conventions... This I think is part of the general attempt to demythologize Churchill. Which again is a very good idea because he has become so much of a golden myth and people have rather lost touch with the complex reality. It can degenerate into a rather irrational and
...iconoclastic Churchill bashing and I think that Charmley, who started off with the best intentions has become rather trapped into it.45

Howard believes that eventually a synthesis will emerge in the debates over Churchill. His great stature in history will remain, but his reputation as a strategist may not bear the burden of future examination. He will remain a great figure in British history in much the same way that Abraham Lincoln remains so in the history of the United States.46 As Robert Blake and William Roger Louis observed in their collection of essays on Churchill, "Churchill will be remembered above all as a great war leader and as a great orator and writer. . . . When subjected to scrutiny in the light of historical evidence, Churchill emerges with both his integrity and his greatness intact."47
PART II
THE SINS OF THE FATHERS:
BRITISH HISTORIANS AND THE MEMORY OF
GERMANY'S PAST

The Flick Affair, 'Hitler's Willing Executioners',
and the Memory of the Holocaust

In the spring of 1996, Oxford University was embroiled in an extraordinary controversy involving a donation by German businessman Gert-Rudolf Flick. Flick had offered over £300,000 to fund a Professorship in European Thought at Balliol College, in response to a fundraising plea by British publisher Lord Weidenfeld. Ethical questions were swiftly raised though as to the origins of the £200 million Flick fortune, and a public debate ensued as to whether Oxford should accept the Flick donation. By April, Flick had requested that his name be removed from the Professorship and that his money be returned.

The Flick affair will be remembered as one of the most emotionally charged debates in British academia in recent years. Its ramifications however extended far beyond the hallowed quads of Balliol, cradle of several British Prime Ministers; the Flick donation was a test case for modern Germany and raised serious questions as to whether the Germans can ever escape from the shadow of Hitler, Auschwitz and their deeply shameful Nazi past. It exposed the fault lines which exist in Britain between those who seek to draw a line with the past in relation to Germany, and those who argue that Germany’s past continues to be the responsibility of her present generation.

Gert-Rudolf Flick is the grandson of Friedrich Flick, who headed an industrial empire in Nazi Germany which produced iron, steel and armaments. Friedrich Flick was imprisoned in 1947 after he was found guilty by the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg "for involvement in organisations connected with enslavement and deportation of slave labour and with murders, brutalities, atrocities, and other inhuman acts committed principally by the SS." It is calculated that 40,000 slave laborers were used in Flick's factories, 80% of whom died. After his release in 1950, Flick rebuilt his empire, which was eventually sold in the mid-1980s to Deutsche Bank. Friedrich Flick died in 1972, bequeathing a fortune valued at US $1 billion. Only $3 million was paid in compensation to Jewish slave laborers forced to work in his factories.

Soon after it was announced that Gert-Rudolf Flick had offered a donation to Oxford, Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, a British economic historian, questioned the ethics of accepting money from Flick. Writing in The Times, Pinto-Duschinsky claimed "that there was little question that profits from expropriations of Jewish property and from slave labour during the Nazi period were a major basis of the postwar Flick empire." The writer asked, "is it not the primary task of the corporations that ran the slave camps to compensate the slaves rather than to sponsor symphony orchestras and universities?"
The powerful response of Oxford University, Jewish leaders and a number of leading British historians was illuminating on the question of “guilt by association.” The suggestion that Gert-Rudolph Flick should be condemned because of the actions of his grandfather were strongly rejected. An investigation by the university’s Ethics Committee found no grounds for associating the name of Dr. Gert-Rudolf Flick with the appalling events in Germany in the 1930s and during the war, or for supposing that Dr. Flick, or the various recipients of his very considerable personal generosity, could be regarded as beneficiaries of those events.\textsuperscript{52}

Entering the debate in a letter to The Times, Lord Shawcross, Chief British Prosecutor at Nuremberg, stated that:

it is neither legally nor morally justifiable that the sins of the grandfather be visited upon a grandson who was in no way personally implicated in the crimes for which the grandfather was tried and punished. Nuremberg established the principle of individual, not collective, let alone family guilt. I am sure that Oxford will benefit greatly from Mr. Flick’s generous endowment.\textsuperscript{53}

His sentiments were echoed by Lord Weidenfeld, who himself had lost half his family in the Holocaust. The Flick benefaction had arisen out of a joint initiative by Weidenfeld and Sir Ronald Grierson (who is of German Jewish origin), with the support of Sir Claus Moser and Sir Isaiah Berlin. Disturbed by rising anti-semitism in Eastern Europe, Weidenfeld had sought to establish a Chair in European Thought to "teach Eastern Europeans the rudiments of democratic society." “I draw a line,” wrote Weidenfeld to The Daily Telegraph, "between those who feel indifferent about the Nazi past and those who, even if they are descendants of accomplices of perpetrators of Third Reich atrocities, have by their words and deeds dissociated themselves. As a Jew, I reject the notion of sippenhass - ostracism on account of the sins of their fathers.”\textsuperscript{54}

Several leading historians argued that it was time to make a complete break with the past with regard to Germany. Alistair Horne, who had served as correspondent for The Daily Telegraph in Germany in the 1950s, argued that “for better or worse one cannot go on perpetuating collective guilt against a nation of 85 million":

It deeply worries me that the new generation in Germany who weren’t even born during the war, should have the burden of collective guilt. I think in the long run it’s going to react very badly against us in England. I think the continentals who suffered much more in a way, being invaded by the Germans, are much more realistic than we are.\textsuperscript{55}

The Flick debate was not just about modern Germany and the burden of collective guilt. It was also about the singularity of the Holocaust and the extreme sensitivity of the Holocaust issue in current historical debate. Despite the support of leading Jewish figures, Flick still felt compelled to withdraw his funding and his name from the Chair in European Thought. The stigma attached
to his name because of his grandfather’s association with the Holocaust was too great a burden for him to bear. Flick felt compelled even to issue an extraordinary public apology for the actions of his forefathers:

I would like to take this opportunity of reiterating my total abhorrence of what took place in Germany during the Third Reich, and to express again my profound personal shame for the involvement of my grandfather in these dreadful events. I have, however, always felt that the fact that I bear the name of Flick should not preclude me from attempting, in a small way, to help improve things for my own and subsequent generations.  

It would be hard to imagine future generations of Russians apologizing for the Soviet purges, descendants of the Japanese imperial army begging for forgiveness at Chinese shrines, or Turkish grandchildren paying homage at the graves of Armenians massacred by their forefathers. It is doubtful that the Serbians will ever repent for the slaughter of Bosnians and Croats, that the Hutus will ever feel remorse for the killing of Tutsis, that the children of the Khmer Rouge will ever seek redemption in the killing fields of Cambodia. Rightly or wrongly, the Holocaust is accorded an elevated special place in world history above all other genocides and mass exterminations, and will always be a unique cross for the German nation to bear.

Echoes of the Flick debate could be heard in the acrimonious discussions over Daniel Goldhagen’s book *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust.* Goldhagen’s *tour de force* was an instant bestseller in both the United States and in Germany where it sold 80,000 copies within just a month of its release in August 1996.

While heavily criticized on both sides of the Atlantic, by both Jewish and non-Jewish historians, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* undoubtedly achieved its desired effect of reigniting the Holocaust debate, particularly in Germany itself. Not since the days of the *Historikerstreit* in the mid-1980s had there been so much heated exchange on Germany and the Final Solution, and what it means for German attempts to “normalize” its history. On a tour of Germany to promote his book, Goldhagen encountered fierce opposition to his thesis from German historians and political commentators. Commenting on the reception Goldhagen received in Germany, The *International Herald Tribune* observed:

Imagine a German author touring the United States to tell America’s premier scholars that they had gotten the history of slavery all wrong. Then magnify that notion several times to get some idea of the commotion in Berlin on Thursday night when Daniel Goldhagen, a Harvard academic, made roughly the same point about the annihilation of 6 million Jews in the Holocaust to some of Germany’s most renowned historians.

The Goldhagen thesis, which talked of the Holocaust as a "German national project" involving hundreds of thousands of Germans with the tacit support of millions more, driven by a deep-seated anti-Semitism, hit a very raw
nerve in the German psyche. Many Germans perceived the book to be an
indictment of an entire culture, and a return to notions of a national collective
guilt, ideas which hardly sit comfortably in the new self-confident Germany, the
driving force of the "new Europe." Jost Nolte, a literary critic with Die Welt,
compared the historical burden of the German people with that of the mythical
Sisyphus, eternally doomed to pushing a boulder uphill. With unification,
observed Nolte, it appeared the Germans had freed themselves from the destiny
of Sisyphus. Now "Mr. Goldhagen has made every effort to shove them back to
damnation." Fritz Stern, Professor of German history at Columbia, believes
that the book "reinforces and reignites earlier prejudices: latent anti-German
sentiment among Americans, especially Jews, and a sense among Germans that
Jews have a special stake in commemorating the Holocaust, thereby keeping
Germany a prisoner of its past."

The response to Goldhagen's book among British historians has been
overwhelmingly negative. Reviewing the book in The Times Literary Supplement,
Jeremy Noakes described the Goldhagen thesis as "deeply flawed". "It is a case
for the prosecution, written with a barely controlled anger which occasionally
bursts to the surface in emotional statements that sit uneasily in a work of
scholarship." Professor Norman Stone believes Goldhagen's book to be
representative of a "pathological anti-Germanism" and "a most unhistorical
book." He points out that Goldhagen ignores the crucial role played in the
Holocaust by non-Germans, including the Dutch:

A higher proportion of the Dutch Jews vanished than of the German Jews.
There was a general strike in Holland against it. The whole thing was
done by a sort of machinery: Dutch bureaucracy, Dutch police, a Jewish
council which forwarded names and addresses and then people being
carted off by trains... Nearly all the Dutch Jews were killed - an
incredibly high proportion. The Dutch Jewish council people were put on
trial for collaboration after the war. Nobody is going to turn around and
say the Dutch - who had been one of the most pro-Semitic European
nations for quite a long time - can in any way be held en masse
responsible for this.

In order to prove his thesis that the Holocaust was the product of unique
anti-semitism on the part of the German race, Goldhagen downplays the extent
of hostility towards Jews in many parts of Europe, not just Germany. According
to Sir Michael Howard, who is himself of German Jewish descent:

The argument that the Germans were uniquely anti-Semitic does seem to
be an extraordinarily narrow-minded one. For heaven's sake look at the
French at the turn of the century, look at the Russians and the pogroms,
look at the Poles. I don't say the Germans were any better than those but
they were no worse. In fact at the turn of the century the Jews were far
better assimilated into German society than they were into French society.
The sad thing is that when you do have an authoritarian state which is
quite deliberately exploiting racial prejudice they will find lots of people
who will go along and do what they tell them to, and enjoy it. I think it's an insight not into German nature but into human nature.66

Paul Johnson, author of several books on Jewish history, has described Goldhagen's understanding of anti-semitism as "naive and ill-informed." Austrians, points out Johnson, "were far more anti-Semitic than the Germans." Hitler, Eichmann and Kaltebrunner, head of the Gestapo, were all Austrians, as were a third of the men in SS extermination units. Johnson states that Austrians were in charge of four of the six main Nazi death camps, and were responsible for the death of nearly half of the six million victims of the Holocaust. Johnson controversially argues that "without the Austrian element, it is doubtful whether the Final Solution would have taken place at all."67

Lord Dacre sees in Hitler's Willing Executioners a return to the anti-German theories of his old adversary, A.J.P. Taylor. According to Dacre, Goldhagen is "flogging a dead horse":

I think it is a mistake, historically untrue and politically disagreeable to put the clock back and use the admitted guilt of a generation in order to saddle the Germans permanently as a nation with that guilt, because I don't feel it's true.68

John Keegan argues that historians are still a long way off from an objective analysis of the Holocaust within the context of twentieth century history. Keegan believes that it will be decades before historians reach a consensus in their understanding of the Holocaust. He points out that it was not until the publication in 1988 of James McPherson's Battle Cry of Freedom that historians were able to come to a fully objective and detached analysis of the American Civil War. In the view of Keegan:

Nobody is going to come to a generally acceptable version of it - I mean not rights and wrongs - it's all wrongs - who was responsible, what were the motives for it. That's not going to emerge for generations. At the same time, the longer the delay the less certain we will be that we are dealing with the truth. The dreadful thing about Holocaust revisionism is this - the denialists have succeeded in closing off objective description of what actually happened. No legitimate historian will now risk the vilification which would certainly be attracted if he or she attempted to say that isn't quite right, that has been exaggerated, or we don't know enough about this. You can't be objective about the Holocaust. And yet there is no doubt that the version of the Holocaust we've got is not an accurate one, it is not an exact one.69

As an example of historical inaccuracy in the portrayal of the Holocaust today, he deplores what he sees as the commercialization of the Auschwitz camps. Auschwitz, Keegan points out, was divided into two camps: Auschwitz 1, a small Polish cavalry barracks used as a labour camp, and Auschwitz-Birkenau, a huge extermination center located two or three miles away. Visitors to Auschwitz are taken not to Auschwitz-Birkenau but to Auschwitz 1, which has
been "Disneyworlded in a way" with exhibits of old suitcases, hair, and other objects, and presented as a major extermination center. Such historical inaccuracies Keegan believes, robs the Holocaust of its dignity and lends fuel to the dangerous claims of Holocaust denialists.  

In conclusion, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, although a flawed work of historical sociology, is both a powerful condemnation of the older generation of Germans and a stark warning against complacency on the part of the new generation. It is also indirectly a significant assault on the "normalizing" of modern German history as the nation seeks a new role at the heart of the European Union. As the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* appropriately described it, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* is "a remarkable manifesto against efforts by Germans to civilize themselves since 1945." It is also a painful illustration of Germany’s tortured relationship with her past, and a reminder that the sins of the forefathers will forever haunt the grandiose European dreams of Germany’s rulers. Further, as John Keegan points out, the debates over Goldhagen’s book demonstrate that it will be generations before historians reach consensus over the causes of the Holocaust and the motives of its perpetrators.
**Dresden, Moral Equivalence, and the Unification of European History**

The growing national self-confidence in Germany following unification was illustrated by the debates which preceded the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing of Dresden in February 1945. The raids, carried out by British and American bombers, left 39,773 Germans dead and 20,000 missing. The Dresden issue and the role played by Arthur “Bomber” Harris as head of Bomber Command during World War Two has been the subject of intense discussion in Britain and Canada in the 1990s. John Keegan has called the debates over strategic bombing, which date back to the 1940s, "the longest running and most intense feud in the field of military history." In Canada, 25,000 ex-servicemen took legal action against the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation over its extremely negative portrayal of Bomber Command in its program “Death by Moonlight,” broadcast in 1992. Senate hearings were even held in the country to discuss allegations that the program’s producers were Nazi sympathizers.

In Britain, the lead up to the fiftieth anniversary of the Dresden raid brought with it a new barrage of criticism of strategic bombing, and numerous claims were made that the carpet bombing of Dresden was a “war crime” rather than an act of war. Professor Norman Stone (whose father was an RAF pilot, killed in action in 1942), described the raids as an act of "gratuitous sadism" and "an aerial holocaust." The Guardian called for a public apology by Britain for Dresden, comparing the debate over Dresden with "Japan's tortuous progress towards full apology for its crimes in the Pacific War." Historian Geoffrey Wheatcroft compared the destruction of German cities with the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and described it as "the direct progenitor of subsequent bombings of civilians, from Vietnam to Afghanistan." "A Rwandan who saw what was done to those cities," noted Wheatcroft, "might have wondered about the claims made for the superiority of Western Civilization."

Simon Jenkins, a political columnist for The Times, has called Dresden "a crime against humanity," and "morally identical to an infantry massacre on the ground." It was the modern version of the medieval "putting a city to fire and the sword."

For reasons that wholly elude me, bombs from the sky enjoy a moral protection not possessed by a soldier on the ground, despite the far greater danger experienced by the latter. If the Russian army had arrived at the gates of Dresden before Harris’s bombers did their work, and had walked through the undefended city skewering babies, torching churches packed with cowering women, dynamiting hospitals and shooting anything that moved to a total of 25,000 human beings, we would have declared it a war crime.

While less graphic than the condemnation of Dresden by some critics in Britain, criticism of the policy of strategic bombing was widespread in Germany, and, unusually, offered Germans the opportunity to portray themselves as the victims. German criticism of Bomber Harris and the raids on Germany were conveniently couched within the utopian parameters of the “new Europe” of
peace and harmony. Building statues to war heroes, some Germans argued, was surely out of place in the modern European Union. Several German mayors were not amused by the Queen Mother's plans to unveil a statue of Bomber Harris in London on 31 May 1992, the fiftieth anniversary of the infamous thousand bomber raid on Cologne. Joachim Becker, Mayor of Pforzheim, one of the worst-hit German cities in the war, retorted that, "Nobody in history has ever erected a memorial to a hangman." Norbert Burger, Mayor of Cologne, urged the Queen Mother not to attend the unveiling of the statue, commissioned by the Bomber Command Association, arguing that:

To put up monuments for destroying old historical cities and cultural values is bad taste. This is not the time to erect monuments to war heroes, especially when within the EC we are striving to establish the United States of Europe.  

"The present period of European history," noted Burger in The Financial Times, "should make us think twice about raising monuments to heroes of past wars. The members of the European Community have agreed to scrap borders between each other. We want to live in friendship with our neighbours. This is a unique achievement in European history."

Burger's sentiments were echoed in an important speech by President Roman Hertzog over two years later:

History written by individual nations in which each one selects what he has done well cannot be allowed to continue. If we really want to unify this Europe, then history must be unified as well. In Dresden, innocent people as well as political prisoners were killed. For me, Dresden was a reason to reject war, an example of the indiscriminate way in which the guilty and innocent are harmed equally by a war machine that produced appalling brutality. What happened to Germany must never be denied or forgotten. But one must understand that, for example, my sons, who are 30 and 35, were born many years after the war. You can no longer speak of guilt in connection with this generation, nor with part of the previous generation, but only of responsibility. We will, therefore, have to develop ways of speaking which remind forthcoming generations of their responsibilities without implying that they suffer a joint guilt for the atrocities of National Socialism. That will no longer be understood. At the same time it is even more necessary to remember history and continue to evaluate it to avoid a repetition.

President Hertzog's speech touched on sensitive issues facing modern Germany. Hertzog made it categorically clear that he was not attempting "to lighten our own burdens by comparing them with those of others," and reminded Germans of the need to remember Germany's Nazi past. However his call, and the call of numerous German mayors, for a "unification" of history and an end to the writing of history by individual nations, raised eyebrows in Britain and critics believed that it could set a dangerous historical precedent, with future leaders of Germany attempting to submerge the history of Nazi Germany.
within the greater history of Europe. The views of German politicians such as Norbert Burger seemingly ignored the essential differences in historical perception between a victor nation such as Britain, which takes great pride in its history, and a defeated nation such as Germany, whose past is cause for great shame.

Condemnation of the Dresden raids also raised the question of "moral equivalence," an issue which had been extensively debated by German historians in the *Historikerstreit*. While in terms of sheer scale it is appropriate to compare the Holocaust with comparable brutal mass killings, for example the purges in the former Soviet Union, it is erroneous to compare the bombing of Dresden with the brutal atrocities carried out by the Japanese in China and South East Asia or the genocidal slaughters in Rwanda/Burundi. It is even more ludicrous to draw parallels between strategic bombings and the extermination of the Jews. As Daniel Johnson pointed out at the time of German protests over the statue to Bomber Harris:

The extreme hatred engendered by carpet bombing survives to this day in the inability of many Germans, even now, to make a clear moral distinction between Dresden and Auschwitz. And yet it was the bombing and the lunar landscapes it created that both awakened sympathy in the victors and helped German industry to modernise itself so rapidly after the war. The eradication of an urban architecture as rich as any in the world helped the Germans to purge themselves of guilt. No country has ever suffered such heavy losses from bombing. Peace was built on foundations laid by the politics of war.\(^5\)

The debate over the rights and wrongs of Dresden will no doubt continue for decades to come. It is significant that 60% of Britons still believe that the bombing of German cities was morally justified.\(^5\) Many leading British military historians, among them Sir Martin Gilbert and Sir Michael Howard, are critical of suggestions that Dresden could legally be described as a "war crime." Howard points out that the destruction of civilians in a war is not in itself a criminal act - whether it is an immoral act is another matter. Howard also stresses that it was by no means apparent at the time of the raids that the bombing of Dresden was unnecessary. The Germans had displayed a powerful capacity for regeneration, and had continued bombarding London until February 1945.\(^5\) Gilbert argues that the bombing of Dresden was not intended as an act of indiscriminate terror, but was aimed at disrupting the movement of German troops and supplies to the Russian front.\(^5\)

Whatever the outcome of the Dresden dispute, it is clear that the debates over strategic bombing are as much about Germany’s future as they are about her past. The comments of President Hertzog and numerous German mayors about forging a common "European" history, have caused concern in a Britain wary of a politically united Europe. They also demonstrate a German self-assertiveness which would have been unimaginable only ten years ago. It is a rising self-confidence which is watched with both resentment and fear in Britain.
In a recent street television interview in Liverpool, a middle-aged resident was asked whether he would be voting in the forthcoming West Merseyside European Parliamentary by-election. Bemused by the cameras he replied: "I don't vote for the German parliament." The turn-out in Merseyside was the lowest ever for a European election in Britain, and was symptomatic of a wider disenchantment with Europe among the British public. Europe, it appears, is still a foreign country in the British consciousness. Opinion polls continue to show a growing hostility in Britain towards further European political integration, the European single currency, and any widening of the powers of the European Commission.

The debates over the Flick donation to Oxford and the Goldhagen controversy have demonstrated a growing consensus among historians in Britain that the present generation of Germans should not be burdened with the sins of their forefathers. At the same time there are increasing doubts over the expanding role of Germany in Europe and an underlying fear that the united Germany of over 80 million people will dominate the continent politically and economically through a highly centralized European superstate, with its economic headquarters in Frankfurt. It is not a fear of jackboots marching through the streets of London, but the fear of a loss of British sovereignty to a Franco-German dominated Europe with the Germans in the driving seat. Ironically, it is not so much the old Germany of the Nazi era which haunts the dreams of Britain's politicians but the specter of the new “Euro-friendly” Germany, whose vision of a federal Europe is anathema to the British vision of a loosely tied purely economic grouping of nations united by the classical liberal principles of free trade.

Anti-German sentiment has been particularly strong in the nation's highly influential newspapers, including the quality broadsheets such as The Daily Telegraph and The Times. An impassioned opinion editorial penned by the thriller writer Frederick Forsyth was representative of a growing wave of anti-German feeling in the British press, often couched in highly emotional terms. Writing in the Telegraph, Forsyth, whose grandfather had fought the Kaiser and whose father had battled Hitler, warned of "deeply disturbing" changes in Germany today, with a Bonn government "hell-bent on the creation, against all opposition, of a single European state, a sort of pan-European megastate."

The British government and opposition parties, sharply divided themselves over Europe, have been forced to adopt an increasingly anti-European stand in order to meet the demands of an overwhelmingly sceptical press and public. The Conservative Party in particular has been compelled to meet the threat of the powerfully financed Referendum Party led by Anglo-French businessman Sir James Goldsmith, which has called for a popular vote in the nation over European economic and political integration.
The European single currency, the “euro,” will be introduced in 1999. Under current plans, by 2002 nearly all West European currencies will be removed from circulation. The single currency will result in the harmonization of tax and social security policies across Europe. The President of the Bundesbank, Hans Tietmeyer, has stated that "a European currency will lead to member nations transferring their sovereignty over financial and wage policy as well as in monetary affairs. It is an illusion to think that states can hang on to their autonomy over taxation policy."92

The ghost of the infamous 1990 Chequers meeting93 has also returned to haunt Anglo-German relations with the recent publication of the diaries of former Thatcher confidante George Urban.94 Urban’s book Diplomacy and Disillusion at the Court of Margaret Thatcher was serialized in The Times and painted a remarkably frank picture of Lady Thatcher’s views on modern Germany. According to Urban’s records, the former Prime Minister had been deeply distrustful of German unification and was "reluctant to see Germany assume a role other than that of a divided country, still controlled by the postwar arrangements." At a meeting of directors of the Centre for Policy Studies, Thatcher had told Urban,

there are things that people of your generation and mine ought never to forget. We’ve been through the war and we’ve known perfectly well what the Germans are like, and what dictators can do, and how national character doesn’t basically change . . . As soon as the Germans have fully recovered, they will reassert their hegemonic interests throughout Eastern Europe . . . With the central European countries reasserting their independence and all the ancient feuds and territorial disputes resurfacing, we may be going back to the state of affairs preceding the First World War.95

From Urban’s account, it is clear that Lady Thatcher’s views were almost identical to those of the late former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry Nicholas Ridley, forced to resign after anti-German remarks he made in an interview with The Spectator magazine in 1990. Ridley’s comments, dismissed by one German newspaper as the "raving of a madman run amok,"96 resulted in a serious breach of Anglo-German relations, the ramifications of which are still felt today. Ridley had warned about "a German racket designed to take over the whole of Europe" which "has to be thwarted." In his view, if Britain was to hand over its sovereignty to a German-dominated Europe run by unelected, unaccountable politicians, "you might just as well give it to Adolf Hitler, frankly."97

Ridley’s comments were particularly significant as they reflected the views of a large percentage of the British electorate. As The Economist pointed out, "Mr. Ridley’s words, however ill-advised, reflect the visceral feelings of millions of fellow-Britons, thousands of Tory party workers and scores, if not hundreds, of Tory MPs."98 Worryingly for Britain’s European partners, the sentiments expressed by Ridley on the European Union have been gaining increasing ground in the British Parliament and press, and among the voting public. Anti-
German feeling, exacerbated by the recent BSE beef crisis, and by a perceived German desire to interfere in the 1997 British general election, has probably never been greater in Britain since the Second World War.

While distancing himself from the overtly anti-German stance of Lady Thatcher, Lord Dacre finds himself in agreement with her views on the threat posed by a federal Europe. "Free trade area yes, political unity no," is the view of Lord Dacre and other historians sceptical of the merits of deeper European Union. Citing Gibbon’s reflections on the fall of the Roman Empire, Dacre argues that a politically united Europe is antithetical to the ideas of pluralism and competition. The mercantilist, bureaucratic, protectionist and unitary organization of Europe, notes Dacre, is a recipe for continental decline. Britain could profitably stand alone from a European superstate doomed to failure.

Professor Norman Stone has recently expressed serious doubts about German designs in Europe:

Now, as often happened, Thatcher's instincts were on the right lines, and we were wrong. There are more grounds for worrying about the Germans than we allowed for . . . What is clear enough is that the Germans do adopt a follow-my-leader line, and do so in crowds. The common currency is a good illustration of this. It has become a tribal - or, for 'Europeans', a multi-tribal - totem . . . Today, British governments are having to deal with a Germany that is intent on having its way over 'Europe'. The Germans have indeed, as Thatcher suspected, gained a huge shot in the arm from unification. That confidence, however, is causing them to throw their weight about, and we are all having to contemplate this horror of a common currency because of it. . . . In fact, close as relations now are, the possibilities for a real problem are greater now than at any previous time.

The view of the pro-European historians is exemplified by that of Correlli Barnett, author of some of the most influential studies of the causes of twentieth century British decline. Barnett has little time for nostalgia for Britain's imperial past, or for what he believes to be outdated notions of “sovereignty.” He believes that the future of Britain lies in some form of federated Europe. He argues that the European Community was founded not just as an economic entity but also as a political union. Britain, he argues, must join the single European currency or be left standing on the sidelines. Barnett cares little for the Pound Sterling, and is fiercely critical of the “Eurosceptics.” They are, he states, emotional idealists nostalgic for a lost past.

Correlli Barnett’s position, though finding greater support within the walls of academia, is distinctly divorced from that of the wider British public. Polls suggest that the public’s position is far closer to that of the “Eurosceptic” historians such as Dacre and Stone, and it is the warnings of such historians that the British government will no doubt be heeding in the years to come. The most comprehensive recent opinion polls on Europe, conducted by Gallup simultaneously in Britain, France, Germany and Italy, indicate that 56% of Britons
are opposed to the European single currency, with only 26% in favor. A surprisingly substantial 38% of Britons support British withdrawal from the European Union, with only 42% supporting continued membership. Most significantly 56% of voters in Britain believe that a European single currency will result in Germany becoming the dominant power in Europe, with 81% of this figure believing German domination to be a “bad thing.”

The Gallup poll also demonstrates considerable unease in Germany over the single currency. While the French and Italians are seemingly happy to abolish the Franc and Lira, a majority of Germans are opposed to giving up the Deutschmark, indicating that Bonn may be increasingly out of touch with public opinion at home. The cost to Germany of meeting the convergence criteria for European Monetary Union set by the Maastricht Treaty, combined with uncompetitive work practices, has been huge. Unemployment has risen steadily over recent months and in January 1997 rose to 12.2%, with 4.65 million Germans out of work, the worst figures since Hitler seized power in Germany in 1933. Ironically, while Britain may well qualify for the single currency in January 1999, the Germans might not.

Nevertheless, it is clear from the poll that Britain’s overwhelmingly negative approach towards European integration is in stark contrast to the integrationist aspirations of her major European partners. Whether Britain will stand in splendid isolation or be dragged into a bold experiment which seeks to redesign the political map of modern Europe is the key question which she faces at the end of the twentieth century. Whichever way she decides, it is certain that perceptions of German power and dominance in the new Europe will be a crucial factor in the final decision.
CONCLUSION

As Great Britain nears the beginning of a new millennium, she ends the century as a setting sun on the world stage. In the space of just a hundred years she has been transformed from the globe’s greatest power with an empire stretching over a quarter of the world’s surface, to a rebellious but resurgent island on the further reaches of an emerging European superstate.

There has been a great deal of soul searching in recent years, as the debates over Churchill have illustrated. Could it all have been different? Could Britain have preserved her Empire, kept out of European conflicts and remained a great power on the world stage? The answer is undoubtedly no. While the war certainly speeded its demise, the Empire was already in eclipse by 1939. The consequences of a Nazi-dominated Europe would have been devastating in the long-run for Britain, and further appeasement would only have brought great shame for future generations. Arguably, the Second World War greatly enhanced Britain’s world standing and allowed her to continue for a longer period as an influential nation on the global stage. Above all, the Second World War gave Britain a great sense of pride and a degree of moral superiority in Europe. Great Britain was the only country to fight the Germans from the first to the last day of the war, and therefore the war has become the major source of British national pride.

The hostile reception in Britain to John Charmley’s Churchill: The End of Glory was a natural reaction to a book which challenged the popular conception of victory in the Second World War as the greatest event in British history. In the words of Stephen Graubard, editor of Daedalus, "Charmley not only dethroned a folk hero but denied the spirit of an age."109

The fiftieth anniversaries of VE Day and VJ Day, in May and August 1995, saw huge nationwide celebrations in Britain on a scale not seen since the end of the Second World War. As John Keegan recorded, "It was the reality of a national epic become myth, for young as well as old, a myth as powerful as that of the Armada, or of Trafalgar and Waterloo. A future historian who accepts that reality will better understand why during 1995, a British government continued to drag its heels on the road into a fuller European Union."110

Whatever the merits or liabilities of European monetary union and European political integration, it is certain that the debates over Britain’s involvement in Europe will be heavily shaped by memories of the Second World War. Significantly, the European debate is not just about Britain’s relationship with the Continent but also about the future of the United Kingdom, facing a possible future break-up of its constituent parts of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland within the European Union. It may be the memory of the First and Second World Wars and a common imperial heritage which will act as the strongest unifying force in the face of calls for devolution.

The memory of the Second World War is powerfully evoked in Britain on both sides of the European debate. The “Eurosceptic” historians and statesmen
seek to find solutions to Britain's contemporary dilemmas by looking back at the lessons of the past. As Andrew Roberts points out, the memory of the Second World War and earlier victorious periods of British history are central to the contemporary arguments against a federal Europe:

The right-wing Thatcherites believe sincerely that the British nation state is under threat from Brussels and they of course look to the past for analogies. They don't see in Chancellor Kohl Adolf Hitler of course . . . It obviously has parallels with the periods of British history when England has been isolated or alone - one thinks also of the Spanish Armada and the Napoleonic Wars - the way in which this country has throughout history attempted to cobble together alliances that it often has to pay for in order to try to break the dominating power of any single great power on the continent - we've had Spain, we've had France, we've had Germany a couple of times. Now it looks like Germany is going too far with Brussels. Empire is going to rise again - not in a violent form - I don't think you're going to have any jackboots marching anywhere. Nevertheless there is a chance that Germany in our lifetimes is going to become the most dominant power on the continent. It is perfectly reasonable to look back to history to see the way this country has defused that threat in the past. I think that it would be moronically stupid if we did not attempt to see how the same situation has been outmaneuvered in earlier times.\[111

Pro-European historians and political leaders have also evoked the memory of the war and Sir Winston Churchill, this time in defense of deeper European integration. Former Conservative Prime Minister Sir Edward Heath, a devoted “Europhile,” has argued that it was Churchill who originally espoused the idea of a United States of Europe in his Zurich speech in 1946. The European Union, argues Heath, represents the triumph of “peace, freedom and equality, ideals that Winston Churchill so eloquently and nobly advanced.”\[112

It is impossible to understand the contemporary debates over Europe without recognition of the immense power which the memory of the Second World War holds over Britain and continental Europe.

In marked contrast to her major European partners, Britain's twentieth-century history, dominated by two world wars, has been a proud one despite the loss of the greatest empire in modern memory. For her European neighbors, the Second World War is not a cause for celebration but a dark episode in their histories.

Germany continues, as the Goldhagen controversy showed, to be burdened with the sins of her forefathers. The annihilation of six million Jews and the brutal invasion of much of Europe, is a past record the Germans wish to forget as she marches into the “new Europe.” The French continue to be haunted by the memories of Vichy France and collaboration, and the humiliation of three major defeats at the hands of Germany in 70 years. The Italians struggle still with the legacy of fascism and Mussolini, and have suffered for decades under corrupt and inefficient government. Much of the remainder of Western Europe, from
Holland to Norway, was either occupied by the Germans or collaborated with them, or both.

For the leaders of Germany and France in particular, a federal Europe is seen as a necessary barrier against any further conflicts in Western Europe. The Germans themselves have consistently argued that it is better to contain a powerful united Germany within the confines of a European Union than allow it to operate as an independent force. It is largely the memories of a shameful past and the desire to make amends and avoid future wars which drives the German government towards ever greater European integration.

A curious dichotomy exists in British perceptions of the modern Germany and her Nazi past. On the one hand there is great sympathy (particularly among academics and Jewish representatives) for the future generations of Germans, seemingly doomed eternally to bear the cross of collective guilt. On the other there is a populist age-old suspicion of the German race, coupled with resentment mixed with fear, which has resurfaced in the 1990s in reaction to German unification and Chancellor Kohl’s vision of a united Europe. It is a suspicion powerfully evoked by Lady Thatcher’s apocalyptic premonitions of an expansionist united Germany reasserting its hegemonic interests on the Continent.

The strong support for Gert-Rudolph Flick’s donation to Balliol among academics and Jewish leaders despite damaging evidence concerning his grandfather’s wartime operations, was illustrative of a desire to draw a line with the past - a rejection of what Lord Weidenfeld called “sippenhass” or ostracism on account of the sins of the fathers. In a similar spirit, Daniel Goldhagen’s book *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* was condemned by some historians as turning the clock back and being guilty of “a pathological anti-Germanism.” The idea of the Germans having held a unique anti-semitism was roundly condemned.

Also significant were the debates surrounding the unveiling of a statue of Bomber Harris in London in 1992, and the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing of Dresden in 1995. The bombing raids drew charges of war crimes from some quarters, this time against the British themselves. The Germans, perhaps for the first time since the war, were able to present themselves as the victims.

German calls, however, for a “unification” of European history led to charges of moral equivalence from some British commentators. The Dresden debate was instructive in that while it highlighted considerable British sympathy and regret for the deaths of 40,000 German civilians, it also illustrated British unease over an increasing German self-assertiveness in Europe, particularly since German unification. Few could have imagined a German mayor protesting to the Queen Mother over a statue unveiled to a British war hero (Bomber Harris) before the momentous events in Germany of 1989 and 1990.

There is a direct correlation between German moves towards European integration and rising anti-German and anti-European sentiment in Downing Street, Westminster and the British media. Ironically, the European Union,
established originally to bring about greater peace and harmony among European nations, has resulted in a growing divide between Great Britain and her continental partners.

The issue of Europe has once again raised “the German question.” A more assertive and self-confident Germany in Europe is perceived by many in Britain to be pursuing an aggressive policy of European integration, which threatens to limit British sovereignty and independence. It is felt by some that in relation to European issues, the German government is adopting what could uncharitably be described as a condescending “master race attitude,” propelling European integration forward at an unacceptably rapid pace while dismissing British protests as irrelevant. Unfortunately for the German government, the highly complex issues surrounding the future of the European Union and the single currency have been enveloped by bitter memories of a conflict waged over 50 years ago.

It will be generations before the memory of World War Two ceases to be a powerful factor in the thinking of British and European policy-makers. The Germans may never escape from the stigma of the Holocaust and the sins of the fathers, destined to be eternally damned in the eyes of history. And perhaps the British will always be trapped in what Correlli Barnett has described as the “1939-45 syndrome,” a triumphal nostalgia for a bygone era which has created an almost unbridgeable psychological divide between Britain and continental Europe.
BRIEF NOTES ON INTERVIEWEES

Correlli Barnett

Christopher Booker

John Charmley

Lord Dacre of Glanton (Hugh Trevor-Roper)
Regius Professor of Modern History, Oxford University, 1957-80. Director of Times Newspapers Limited, 1974-88. Editor of Hitler’s Table Talk, Hitler’s War Directives, 1939-45, The Goebbels Diaries, and The Last Days of Hitler.

Alistair Horne

Sir Michael Howard

John Keegan
Andrew Roberts

William Roger Louis

Norman Stone
Professor of Modern History at Oxford University and Trustee of the Thatcher Foundation. Author of The Eastern Front, 1914-1917, Hitler, and Europe Transformed, 1878-1919.

Count Nikolai Tolstoy
Author of The Victims of Yalta, Stalin’s Secret War, and The Minister and the Massacre.

Ironically, the book was published while Charmley was a visiting Fulbright scholar at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, where he held a professorial chair dedicated to Sir Winston Churchill.


Clark was Minister of State at the Ministry of Defence from 1989-1992, and Minister for Trade from 1986 to 1989.


See also Alan Clark, “Historians Who Go To War With Hindsight,” *The Times*, 16 January 1993.

Clark described it as “a pied piper’s trail of opportunity discarded, needless abasement endured, and a grievous ransom paid in blood and treasure.” (“A Reputation Ripe for Revision,” *The Times*, 2 January 1993).

Interview with John Charmley, Norwich, 8 May 1996.


Interview with Lord Dacre, Didcot, Oxfordshire, 14 December 1996.


Interview with Sir Michael Howard, Oxford 15 July 1996.

For example, Lord Baden Powell was the subject of a scathing Channel 4 documentary broadcast in December 1995 as part of the “Secret History” series, while Cecil Rhodes was the subject of a damaging eight-part BBC dramatization in Autumn 1996.


Reviewing Ponting’s book, *The Economist* commented: ”This is not Churchill, warts and all; it is only Churchill’s warts.” (7 May 1994).


Interview with John Charmley, Norwich, 8 May 1996.

Quoted by Bradshaw, “The Dons of War.”

Quoted by Bradshaw, “The Dons of War.”

Interview with John Charmley, Norwich, 8 May 1996.

Interview with John Charmley, Norwich, 8 May 1996.


The full text of Lord Beloff’s speech can be found in Max Beloff, “The British Empire,” *History Today*, February 1996.


In Roberts’ view:

I don’t think the world is a happier, better or safer place for the demise of the British Empire. We of course look for the reasons for this. Where Alan and I and John and I would disagree is their attempts to blame America for everything. I think America was guilty of a gross miscalculation at the time of Suez, but at the time of 1945 it was doing what every nation should do and look after its best interests - if it could supplant the British Empire then it was the British Empire's fault for being in the position it was . . . . An American dominated world is certainly better than a Nazi dominated world.
(Interview with Andrew Roberts, London 26 March 1996).


41 Interview with Sir Michael Howard, Oxford, 15 July 1996.


A later article in *The Guardian* by another historian, Tom Bower, was also fiercely critical of Flick. Bower wrote that “no German university would ever be a party to the rehabilitation of Flick’s name by accepting money”:

if the college’s refusal to confront the truth continues, then presumably Balliol will happily accept an endowment for a chair in European humanity from Roll Mangle, the innocent son of Auschwitz’s famous doctor. After all, Muck (Flick) and Rolf are identical: both Germans are descendants of Nazi criminals and both enjoy wealth created in that terrible era, albeit that Rolf retains the consolation that his father was unconvicted. In the meantime, Balliol’s stubborn prevarication suggests that its reputation is for sale. The starting price is a mere £300,000.


51 The Ethics Committee was headed by the following academics:

Sir Patrick Neill QC, former Warden of All Souls, the Reverend Ernest Nicholson, Provost of Oriel, Ruth Deech, Principal of St. Anne’s, Dr. Peter North, Principal of Jesus and Vice-Chancellor of Oxford. (See Letter to the Editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, by Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, Chancellor, Oxford University, 22 April 1996).

Lord Shawcross, QC, Letter to the Editor of The Times, 14 March 1996.

Lord Weidenfeld, Letter to the Editor of The Daily Telegraph, 11 March 1996. See also Sir Sigmund Sternberg’s letter to The Times, dated 16 March 1996. Supporting the acceptance of the Flick benefaction, Sternberg pointed out that: this gift, of course, does not discharge the legitimate claims of the survivors of the slave-labour regime in the wartime Flick operation to be recompensed for their suffering. That question remains to be solved.


See for example Frank Schirrmacher’s comments in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, quoted in The New York Times, 25 April 1996: Goldhagen is pursuing a remystification of the Holocaust. He is leading it back into the Faustian depths of the German soul and denying rational access to it.


It should be emphasized that Goldhagen himself strongly rejects the implication of a German collective guilt in his book. He told The New York Times (1 April 1996) that “Germany is the great success story of the post-war period. The Germans have remade themselves into liberal democrats. They’re like us.”


Interview with Professor Norman Stone, Oxford, 29 April 1996.

Interview with Professor Norman Stone, Oxford, 29 April 1996.


Interview with Lord Dacre, Didcot, Oxfordshire, 14 December 1996.


Quoted by The Daily Telegraph, 16 April 1996.


The Guardian, 26 July 1994. Legal action against the program’s producers was defeated in 1994.


Quoted by The Daily Telegraph, 28 May 1992.


Quoted by The Daily Telegraph, 24 November 1994.

Quoted by The Independent, 14 February 1995.


Interview with Sir Michael Howard, Oxford 15 July 1996.


Only 11% of the constituency’s 515,000-strong electorate bothered to vote. (The Times, 14 December 1996).


Goldsmith is also leader of the French L'Europe des Nations Party and a member of the European Parliament.

93The Chequers seminar on Germany was convened by then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in March 1990, and attended by several historians including Gordon Craig, Fritz Stern, Lord Dacre, Norman Stone and Timothy Garton Ash, plus George Urban and Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd. A leaked anti-German memorandum written by Thatcher’s Private Secretary, Charles Powell, had caused an uproar soon after the seminar.

94Urban was Director General of Radio Free Europe, and an adviser in the late 1980s and early 1990s to the British government.

95George Urban, *Diplomacy and Disillusion at the Court of Margaret Thatcher* (London, 1996), serialized in *The Times*, 23 September 1996. Urban footnoted in his diary: “I was amazed to hear her uttering views about people and countries, especially Germany, which were not that different from the Alf Garnett version of history.”


97“Saying the Unsayable About the Germans,” Interview with Nicholas Ridley by Dominic Lawson, *The Spectator*, 14 July 1990.


100Interview with Lord Dacre, Didcot, Oxfordshire, 14 December 1996.


103Interview with Correlli Barnett, Cambridge, 14 June 1996.


105Only 43% of German respondents were in favour of a single European currency. In France 61% were in favour, and in Italy 71%.


108In Britain, only 27% are in favour of a more integrated Europe. In Germany, France and Italy, 53%, 56% and 67% respectively are in favour.


111Interview with Andrew Roberts, London, 26 March 1996.


113Interview with Correlli Barnett, Cambridge, 14 June 1996.