Introduction

Row upon row they stood to sing,
A thousand at a word,
And loud arose 'God save the King'.
But as I watched and heard,
The upturned faces in the light
Of early afternoon
Reminded me of crosses white
Beneath a silent moon.

Enoch Powell, 1938[1]

The breath which condemns submission to laws this nation has not
made condemns submission to scales of value which this nation had
not willed. To both sorts of submission I ascribe the haunting fear,
which I am sure I am not alone in feeling, that we, the British will
soon have nothing left to die for.

That was not a slip of the tongue. What a man lives for is what a man
dies for, because every bit of living is a bit of dying. At the begin-
ning I refused to define patriotism; but now at the end I venture it.
Patriotism is to have a nation to die for, and to be glad to die for it – all
the days of one's life.

Enoch Powell, 1977[2]

Old soldier

In February 1998, close to thirty years after Powell delivered his land-
mark 'Rivers of Blood' speech, he lay in state at Westminster Abbey,
in the Chapel of St Faith, until his funeral at St Margaret's Church.
Powell, one of the most hated and most revered of British politicians,
even in death, could not avoid controversy. Criticism surrounded the
fact that the Church of England had accorded the honour of lying in
state in such a 'shrine of British nationhood' to a politician so much

[1] Enoch Powell, *Collected Poems* (London: Bellew Publishing, 1990), p. 64.
[2] Enoch Powell, *Wrestling with the Angel* (London: Sheldon Press, 1977), p. 8.

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equated with racism and anti-immigrant sentiment in Britain.[3] Powell was allowed to lie in state at the Abbey's Chapel of St Faith (a third-century martyr whose name is invoked by soldiers, prisoners and pilgrims) because he had been a warden of the adjoining parliamentary church of St Margaret's and a regular communicant at Westminster Abbey – not, one Abbey divine insisted, because he was a politician. Still, anti-Powell protesters gathered outside the Abbey that day.

Due to his outspoken opposition to the rights of entry of black, New Commonwealth immigrants into Britain and his insistence that Britain needed to rid itself of its commitments to a long-dead empire, Powell was, by 1998, more than just a politician. Enoch Powell was not just a single soul due the solace of the Church; he was, rather, 'a myth, bogyman.'[4] As race relations expert Mike Phillips put it, 'I shall always think of him as part of my history and as part of my identity as a Briton.'[5] Powell was a historical symbol. The continued currency and controversy of his name attest to this. Allowing such a symbol into Westminster Abbey was, according to some, a political act.[6]

Powell's funeral service was high Anglican. His coffin was draped in the Union Jack. The choir preceded the coffin with music of high Anglican austerity.[7] A reading from A. E. Housman's poem 'A Shropshire Lad,' which Powell even in his eighties could not recite without breaking into tears, was given at the funeral.[8] This iconic and sentimental poem spoke of lost innocence and is intimately tied in Britain to the massive loss of humanity of the First World War. Significantly, Powell was buried in his brigadier's uniform. As one obituary put it, he was laid to rest, not as a scholar or politician, but 'as the old soldier he really was.'[9] He asked for a full military funeral and, over fifty years after the end of his service in the Second World War, was buried alongside his former comrades in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. As well as indicating his embrace of hierarchy and institutional authority, this endpoint in the story of Enoch Powell reveals Powell's deep nostalgia for war service and military comradeship.

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[3] Paul Vallely, 'Established Values: How the Church Nearly Lost its Way over the Death of Enoch Powell,' *The Independent*, 19 February 1998.
[4] Norman Shrapnel and Mike Phillips, 'Enoch Powell: An Enigma of Awkward Passions,' *The Guardian*, 9 February 1998.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Vallely, 'Established Values.'
[7] Paul Vallely, 'Old Order Mourns Enoch Powell,' *The Independent*, 19 February 1998.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Sarah Wilson, 'Powell Laid to Rest as the Old Soldier He Really Was,' *The Scotsman*, 19 February 1998.

Powell's desire to be buried in full military attire suggests a preoccupation with the glory of war and violence – and a performance of the lost political rectitude of, as he put, 'to kill and be killed.'[10] To many, it is the fitting endpoint of a man thought to have fascist inclinations. It is the contention of this book, however, that Powell represents something quite different in British political history than Oswald Mosley and the (distinctively unsuccessful) British Fascist movement.[11] Powell's career even fits uneasily within the political parameters of the heavily Powellite National Front party. While his political views were at times racist and authoritarian, it is important to clarify that they were grounded in a distinctively English, postwar and *postcolonial* version of nationalism. Like fascism, Powell's postcolonial nationalism relied on an obsessive preoccupation with community decline and victimhood. But whereas fascism and imperialism maintain a faith in the power of the state to transform or purify society, Powell's postcolonial nationalism was touched by the lessons of empire's end. The experience of empire left an indelible mark on Powell.

Powell's nationalism grew out of an intense belief in the necessity of allegiance to the Crown – and, more generally, to 'the unique structure of power' for which the English Crown was the 'keystone (the only conceivable and indispensable keystone).'[12] Early on in Powell's life, allegiance offered political certainty in the uncertain world of empire. As he put it to his parents when writing home from India in 1943, his willingness to sacrifice himself to Britain's 'unique structure of power' represented to him, 'the nearest thing in the world to an absolute (as opposed to a relative) value: it is like the outer circle that bound my universe, so that I cannot conceive of anything beyond it.'[13] Powell's deference to institutional authority and hierarchy was, he believed, what gave meaning or value to the individual.[14] The individual alone was a nonentity – claims of superiority, inferiority or equality would, therefore, apparently fall on deaf ears – it was the hierarchical organic (national) whole that mattered. The nation was, then, in Powell's mind a collective project; it endowed everyday life and individual aspirations with meaning. 'It enables us,' as he put it in 1965, 'to daydream as we live out our lives, as the factory-girl daydreams with the aid of her

[10] Letter from Powell to Ellen and Albert Powell, 19 March 1939. POLL 1.1.4.
[11] For the discussion of the need in the West to move beyond conceiving of racism in terms of (Second World War era) fascism, see Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
[12] Powell to Ellen and Albert Powell, 9 March 1943. POLL 1.1.5.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Enoch Powell, Bill Schwarz interview, 26 April 1988.

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paperback thriller.'[15] According to Powell, then, the individual finds the essential drama, romance and moral meaning of life via the nation in history, in maps, in *identification* with the collective project of the nation. Identification with the 'power and glory' of the nation was, he argued, the very basis of social deference and political order. As Powell put it, 'If we are not to be powerful and glorious ourselves it is some compensation to think we belong to something powerful and glorious … "thou shalt get kings, though thou be none."'[16] As this book will reveal, Powell's recognition that this collective project was a fragile construction – a dream that could be lost – was born out of his experiences of the colonial world.

The peculiarities of political belonging in Britain have a long history. As Linda Colley's work has emphasized, a shared national identity of Britain was 'forged' between 1707 and 1837 in relation to the alien other, through the vehicles of war and religion.[17] Francophobia was, she argues, its foundation. Even more, it was largely through war that British people had first-hand experience of Britishness as a universal, Christian project of empire.[18] In 1970, Tom Nairn made a similar point on the character of English political dominance in Britain. 'Modern English conservatism was forged,' he notes, 'out of its 22-year war against the French Revolution and Napoleon.'[19] That war fathered what Nairn calls 'a non-popular nationalism' that 'survived on the surrogates of imperialism and foreign war.'[20] This was a conservative nationalism that did not rely on 'the genius of the people,' on a picture of a unified and essentialized culture of the people.[21] War and allegiance were, therefore, particularly significant in defining who belongs in a historically imperial, multinational and profoundly classed society. And so, Nairn claimed in 1970, for a nationalist (and unionist) like Powell: 'England needs another war.'[22] Only then would the English remember who belonged and who did not.

Though Powell spoke consistently of the British nation and later tied his career to the cause of Ulster Unionism, it was the English countryside, the English people, English history and the English Crown in

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[15] 'Power and Glory: The Nation in the Mirror,' speech by J. Enoch Powell to Manchester Convention Dinner, 6 November 1965. POLL 4.1.2.
[16] Ibid. Here Powell is quoting the Third Witch of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.
[17] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).
[18] Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 169.
[19] Tom Nairn, 'Enoch Powell: The New Right,' *New Left Review* (1/61, May–June 1970), p. 8.
[20] Ibid.   [21] Ibid.   [22] Ibid.

Parliament that sat at the heart of his political imagination. This slippage and acceptance of English hegemony within the British nation does not mean, however, that we can deny that Powell thought in the postwar years in terms of the Union. The Union was a collective project that could, Powell told an Ulster audience in 1978, contain diversity; it could contain 'regional dimensions' that were 'profound, historic and self-conscious.'[23] In fact, Powell argued that Parliament was 'the natural protector of all minorities' because 'it is itself made up of minorities,' which meant, he argued, that all are prevented as minorities from 'coercing or trampling upon one another beyond a certain point.'[24] The English were one among many. This is, of course, a far cry from his views on the political impact of ethnic minorities in Britain.

Despite this faith in the historical institution of Parliament, war remained, for Powell, the answer to the problem of belonging in an imperial and multinational state. For Powell, war was the ultimate and final assertion of political allegiance – the sacrifice of one's body and soul to the state. In parallel with his views on Church membership, political identity was necessarily proven in the moment of war, in action and ritual not in shared abstract principles or democratic commitments. This he explicitly juxtaposed with the presumptions of postwar internationalism and human rights.

Critically, after the empire, Powell believed that the loyalty of black Britons would always be problematic; the black Briton, according to Powell, would always carry the problem of a failure of allegiance – or deference – to the nation. Unsurprisingly, these views underpinned a profoundly gendered vision of political belonging. We see this, for instance, in 1981 when Powell moved an amendment against a provision in the new Nationality Bill which would extend the transmission of British citizenship through mothers as well as fathers. Powell argued that nationality must be transmitted only through fathers for one simple reason:

Nationality, in the last resort, is tested by fighting. A man's nation is the nation for which he will fight. His nationality is the expression of his ultimate allegiance. It is his identification with those with whom he will stand, if necessary, against the rest of the world, and to whose survival he regards the survival of his own personal identity as subordinate.[25]

[23] Enoch Powell, speech at Inch, Downpatrick, 6 May 1978 as cited in Paul Corthorn, 'Enoch Powell, Ulster Unionism, and the British Nation,' *Journal of British Studies*, 51: 4 (October 2012), pp. 967–997.

[24] Enoch Powell, speech at Eglinton, 25 April 1980 as cited ibid., p. 985.

[25] As cited in Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinitie*s (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 11–12.

In this light, it is perhaps not surprising that Powell used the language of war and invasion to comprehend black immigration and the growth of ethnic communities in Britain.

Importantly, Powell's understanding of race was Tory in character. Though racism takes many forms in Britain, in one variety of British racism, 'race' functions uniquely: as Powell noted in 1978, 'Skin-colour is like a uniform.'[26] In this single line, we begin to see the limits of David Cannadine's argument against the historical significance of racial difference both in the empire and within Britain. Cannadine insists that the British imperial world was not imagined in black and white, or British 'self' and racial 'other.' Rather, we must look to imperial elites, to their pomp and ornamental display of a complex, finely gradated and multiracial hierarchy, to find a more accurate vision of the way in which Britain's imperial community was imagined – at least until the 1950s. But race, like class, *ordered* British rule.[27] It was, in a sense, another part of the 'ornamentation' of the social order. Race was a uniform which structured the hierarchical whole. Powell's use of this term 'uniform' is significantly ambiguous: it suggests both an acceptance of the historical constructedness of racial categorization while at the same time posing it as an untranscendable boundary. The immigrant's complete assimilation is dependent on her ability to shed her skin. This impossibility, in many ways, represented for Powell the impossibility of maintaining an ahistorical, abstract space for democracy. Here, we find a Tory acceptance of an imperfect, racist world. With this, it is clear that Powell's understanding of the consequences of immigration was not merely a brand of cultural xenophobia. Remarkably, it did not matter to Powell when estimating Britain's future 'alien' population that a person might be born of a British mother or father: cultural conformity (and *classed* habits) would not suffice. Even more, Powell was unconcerned with the vast numbers of European immigrants who settled in Britain during and after the Second World War. Simply put, in Powell's mind, the black Briton's visible presence in the metropole disordered the hierarchical whole. This view of blackness as a seed of social disorder was not unique to Powell but part of a broad current of opinion, which took hold especially after the Notting Hill race riots of 1958 and borrowed much from the increasingly contentious politics of white settler

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[26] J. Enoch Powell, *New Statesman*, 13 October 1978.
[27] David Feldman, 'Why the English Like Turbans: Multicultural Politics in British History,' in David Feldman and Jon Lawrence (eds.), *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 281–302.

communities in British Africa.[28] It is not accurate, then, to simply view postwar British society as the inheritor of a singular, imperial belief in white racial superiority and social order. Rather, 'race' as a belief is not fixed but is a flexible entity that promises to make sense of the tensions and social hierarchies of a particular moment with a set of (malleable) 'truths.' The lessons of empire, and the medium of the message, changed over time: the rearguard protection of white privilege in Africa reflected back onto Britain.

Powell at various times denied that there was any meaning to the words 'race' or 'class' (what he never denied was that 'the unique structure of power' of British rule depended on both homogeneity and deference).[29] Conflict did not occur between races, he insisted, but between 'social organizations' – on political, not biological terms.[30] This is not to say that this strictly political view of race in postwar Britain is sufficient in explaining the power of Powell's impact in 1968. This view of 'race' as a political division echoes the post-Nazi arguments in favour of racial segregation in South Africa and the United States. Powell's use of the war experience in his speeches provided his supporters with a (political) logic of racial exclusion – a logic which his listeners could make immediately personal and self-evident. As the following letter to Powell makes clear, the incorrect belief that black Britons were absent from the sacrifices of the Second World War was often a backdrop on which to project blatant racism:

I never saw 1 coloured person at Dunkirk and they want to come here and run our little Island what was peaceful and now it is full of MONGREL'S [sic] … I hope you could bring up some of these points in Parliament and better still bring back our FREE SPEECH FOR THE BRITISHER, I MEAN WHITE, AND FREEDOM WHICH WE FOUGHT FOR AT DUNKIRK … I ONCE HEARD A NIGGER SAY TO ANOTHER NIGGER … HAVE INTERCOURSE WITH WHITE WOMEN AND KILL ALL WHITE MEN, AND I REALLY BELIEVE IT SIR THE PATTERN IS HERE BUT NOT TO STAY I HOPE.[31]

The war, and particularly the potent myth of British self-reliance at Dunkirk, served as a means to define who belonged. As this letter

[28] Bill Schwarz, *The White Man's World* (*Memories of Empire*, vol. 1; Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 11.
[29] For Powell's denial of a consciousness of 'class' see J. Enoch Powell, Bill Schwarz interview, 26 April 1988. For Powell's denial of 'race' see J. Enoch Powell, 'Beyond Immigration,' *Frontier* (February 1973), cited in Rex Collings (ed.), *Reflections of a Statesman: The Writings and Speeches of Enoch Powell* (London: Bellew Publishing, 1991), pp. 152–158
[30] Enoch Powell, 'Beyond Immigration,' in *Reflections of a Statesman*, pp. 153–154.
[31] Letter to Powell sent 21 April 1968. POLL 8.1.8.

demonstrates (and it is one of a great number), remembering war was entangled in deep racism. As Paul Gilroy has underlined, memories of the Second World War continue to serve the purpose of racial exclusion.[32] In this startling letter to Enoch Powell we see the recollection of war used as an assertion of free speech, freedom and parliamentary democracy against the black immigrant – a racist 'anti-fascism.'

In a discussion of race and memory, Bill Schwarz makes clear that 'the palpably conservative or racist manifestations of ethnic belonging in the 1950s and 1960s' were 'neither simply recidivist nor in any simply sense only domestic.' Rather, they may have 'a more dynamic and complex history than they are conventionally accorded.'[33] Powell's letters from the public tie tightly together old war stories with new experiences of social uncertainty and postwar scarcity. The letters in favour of greater immigration restrictions, which are estimated to number over 110,000 in response to the 'Rivers of Blood' speech alone, are steeped in racism, yet they also highlight experiences of profound social and economic vulnerability and serve as testaments to social and political changes unrelated to immigration. Powell's letter-writers speak of student protests, labour unrest, but most of all they speak of the indignities of declining welfare provisions – filled hospital beds and unavailable council houses.[34] Charles Tilly insists that we must look to the ways in which particular rights and obligations are bundled together to 'activate' certain identities and bind participants in political action.[35] The confessional letters Powell received from the public should not merely be read as irrational or misdirected emotional outbursts.[36] Powell and his supporters framed the issue of black immigration within a set of coordinates that reveals a great deal about the moral architecture of public and private life at this time. Their emphasis on wartime sacrifices and their expressions of postwar shame and indignation disclose something of the prevailing vocabulary of 'legitimate' grievances and of the broader emotional culture of postwar Britain. 'The process of becoming modern,' Schwarz argues, 'can turn on the telling of old stories, the fabrications of memory

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[32] Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
[33] Bill Schwarz, 'Reveries of Race: The Closing of the Imperial Moment,' in Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters (eds.), *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945–1964* (New York University Press, 1999), pp. 189–207 (p. 190).
[34] 'Selection of letters from public following 20 April 1968,' POLL 8.1.8.
[35] Charles Tilly, 'Political Identities in Changing Politics,' *Social Research*, 70: 2 (Summer 2003), pp. 605–620 (p. 611).
[36] For a discussion of the significance of emotion in political activism, see Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

serving to compensate for the dislocations of modernization.'[37] As one man wrote in 1968:

Dear Sir, I was there – [on] the Somme (where many whites from S.A. lost their lives) … I stopped a bullet. 1967 In my old age, I was driven out of my home, by Pakistanis who coveted the house I lived in.[38]

The formation of postwar conservatism entailed, then, the 'reworking' of old forms of identity – and particularly memories of war service – to face new circumstances. Not least of these new circumstances was the closure of the colonial era and, linked to this, the increasing challenges to Britain's postwar settlement.

Powell and a political generation

Biographies usually begin with birth and end in death. In one way or another, the historical question to be answered through that window of time is why the person studied came to do the things he or she did. Psychoanalytic theory promises an answer: childhood, as well as grand-parents and parents, clear the path for the history that follows. So, too, does a highly empirical approach – wherein the particular moments of day-to-day life elicit choices and the small, understandable steps forward until death. This is the approach of Simon Heffer in his biography, *Like the Roman: The Life of Enoch Powell*.[39] Powell was a prodigy from humble beginnings – a quiet and diligent outsider, the son of a Birmingham elementary schoolmaster and a teacher of nonconform-ist stock. According to Heffer, the historical answer to the question of Enoch Powell is that Powell did what he did due to the particularities of circumstance and, to a lesser extent, due to the constraints of his immutable personality. Heffer's approach carries an inherent sympathy for the subject. We are placed always in the same moment of time as Enoch Powell, with the same blinders and – despite our knowledge of Powell's mistakes – the same overarching ideological vision. In an effort to assert ideological difference, left-wing criticism has too often repre-sented Powell as entirely alien: he is a timeless monster whose political vision is held together by a disturbing mother complex or an impassable racism.[40] For example, as Paul Foot wrote in an obituary for Powell, he

[37] Schwarz, 'Reveries of Race,' p. 191.
[38] Letter to Powell, 23 April 1968. POLL 8.1.8.
[39] Simon Heffer, *Like the Roman: The Life of Enoch Powell* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998).
[40] See Paul Foot, 'Beyond the Powell: Obituary of Enoch Powell,' *Socialist Review* no. 217 (March 1998) and Jonathan Rutherford, *Forever England: Reflections on Race, Masculinity and Empire* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1997).

was 'a racist to his bones … Almost licking his lips, he looked forward to race riots … There was no satisfying his racist appetite.'[41] Powell here is obscene. His 'passion for empire' was an ideology that continued to his death and gave him 'an incontrovertible belief that the white man was ordained by god to conquer and control the world which was populated mainly by inferior black people.'[42] There is no sense of change over time. Powell is the imperial monster that can come again: his life must be used as a warning 'to prepare for the next racist demagogue to come along, and to shut him up.'[43]

Questions regarding Powell's apparently repressed homosexuality as well as his strong childhood attachment to his mother similarly provide some with an explanation for Powell's (political) perversions. Jonathan Rutherford offers a Freudian analysis of Powell's views on racial ghetto-ization. In this analysis, Powell's love of India served as a replacement for his feeling of abandonment by his mother:

Powell's twin imagery of invasive fragments and unassimilable lumps are the representations of his own infantile defence mechanisms against the dread of his mother's absence … The black and Asian immigrants who had once con-stituted the anonymous, passive backdrop to Powell's idealisation of empire, and who, through his splitting and projection became the persecutory cause of the loss of his loved empire, have now come to symbolise the return of the repressed.[44]

Simon Heffer – and, in fact, perhaps all of Powell's sympathetic biogra-phers – would probably be pleased to accept that Powell had a mother complex. With such a diagnosis, we are left prone to find undue satis-faction in uncovering the unhealthy roots of Powell's racism and leav-ing the argument at that.

Both efforts, to humanize and to dehumanize Powell, fail as history. Perhaps because his words in 1968 still reverberate loudly in Britain, both those who criticize and those who sympathize with Powell write his life-story as though they are revealing the backstory of a present enigma in British popular consciousness.[45] The popular mantra 'Enoch

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[41] Foot, 'Beyond the Powell.' Strangely, this stands in contrast to Foot's assessment of Powell in 1969. At that time, Foot offered the first serious critical assessment of Enoch Powell in *The Rise of Enoch Powell*. Powell is represented as ideologically malleable and opportunistically pandering to popular fears in an effort to take the Conservative leadership. Paul Foot, *The Rise of Enoch Powell: An Examination of Enoch Powell's Attitude to Immigration and Race* (London: Cornmarket Press, 1969).

[42] Foot, 'Beyond the Powell.'   [43] Ibid.

[44] Rutherford, *Forever England*, p. 127.

[45] Patrick Cosgrave, *The Lives of Enoch Powell* (London: Bodley Head, 1989); Howard Pedraza, *Winston Churchill, Enoch Powell, and the Nation* (London: Cleveland Press, 1986); Robert Shepherd, *Enoch Powell: A Biography* (London: Hutchinson, 1996).