

**HOW BRITANNIA RULED THE WAVES: TEACHING THE HISTORY OF  
THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

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# **How Britannia Ruled the Waves: Teaching the History of the British Empire in the Twenty-First Century**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Over recent years there has been a great deal of discussion and public debate in the UK about the type of History that students should learn in English schools in the twenty-first century. The history of the British Empire – as a subtopic – arose frequently in such debates, as figures from the right and left of the political spectrum voiced concerns that through studying British imperialism, students might be inculcated with specific, unified perceptions about their national identity, modern Britain and its place in the world. Using questionnaires, focus groups and one-on-one interviews, this study brings the big questions that arose from the national debate back into the classrooms of England via students and their teachers. The findings of this study suggest that perhaps the national debate has been premised on shaky foundations, by accepting that the content that one studies has a significant, formative impact on how one comes to view the history of British imperialism. This study does not suggest that content has no impact, but rather that a range of other factors, particularly factors from beyond the classroom, are more significant in determining students' broader perceptions of British imperialism. The findings presented here also suggest that the study of British imperial history is important and significant in the English classroom of the twenty-first century, in the eyes of both students and teachers. Though the study indicates that the content studied does not result in unified perceptions of British imperialism, the majority of participants in the study, both students and teachers, felt that coverage of the topic was essential for young people to be able to contextualise and inform their independently forged perceptions about modern day Britain, its place in the world and their place within it.

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Sections of this thesis that have been published in an earlier and different format are noted as such in footnotes at the start of relevant chapters. My sincere gratitude also goes to Jovita Callueng, Permission Assistant at the British Library, for granting permission for the two images used in this study to be reproduced in this thesis.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

“The British Empire”: the very phrase conjures up different images and ideas to different people. For some, the phrase evokes such ideas as: the heroic defence of Rorke’s Drift, as immortalised in the 1964 Michael Caine film *Zulu*; the spread of so-called “Christian civilisation” by figures such as Dr David Livingstone; or British education, commerce and industry taming an otherwise “savage” wilderness. For others, it evokes something quite different: the trans-Atlantic slave trade; the infamous Amritsar Massacre; or oppressive regimes cast off by the “true” heroes of empire, such as Mahatma Gandhi. As for the rest, perhaps they take elements from both viewpoints. Few today would present the British Empire as wholly a force for good, run by white, male British heroes, nor would many present it as wholly iniquitous, oppressive and entirely without its moments of redemption. Yet, central to this thesis is not what academic historians think, but what the young people of twenty-first century Britain think about the British Empire. Moreover, what is of more pressing concern is the extent to which *what* students learn about British imperialism in school shapes their views of this vast and sprawling topic. Such a study not only enables History teachers to further understand the nature of student learning about the events of Britain’s imperial past, but it can also add an element of much-needed practitioner-based, student-focused research into an area that has been – up to this point – largely debated in the abstract by politicians, academics, and the media. This introduction outlines the nature of the debates in Britain between 2010 and the writing of this thesis. These debates sparked my interest in the topic, and also help to show why – far from being a parochial concern – beginning to answer the sort of questions raised here can help initiate the process of finding answers to a litany of questions about what students in the twenty-first century should be learning in England’s schools.<sup>1</sup>

At the start of the twentieth century, Britannia did indeed “rule the waves,” and the inevitability of British imperialism’s place in the History classroom was beyond question.<sup>2</sup> Historian Peter Yeandle has recently published a volume on this very subject, exploring schooling from the 1870s through to the 1920s, and the extent to which

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<sup>1</sup> I refer here to “English” schools because the National Curriculum – that forms the focal point of much of the political/media discussion here – applies only to schools in England (not the entire UK).

<sup>2</sup> A reference to “Rule, Britannia!”, a still-popular nationalistic poem/song set to music by Thomas Arne and first performed in 1740.

British imperialism influenced History educators. For Yeandle, the political debates of the times in which he was writing and researching his work provided clear signals of its contemporary resonance (as was also the case for this thesis). To this end, Yeandle points to the UK Conservative-led coalition government (2010-2015), and the former [English] Education Secretary Michael Gove's (2010-2014) quest to return to a "golden age" of history teaching with a 'content-led curriculum, devoid of educational theory, and intended to promote national identity' (Yeandle, 2015, 1).<sup>3</sup> For many, as is explored further below, this alleged attempt to glorify Britain's past would also involve boosting the presence of British imperial history in the National Curriculum for England.<sup>4</sup> Political scientist and historian Inderjeet Parmar (2010), argues that Gove was aiming to revive a somewhat dormant post-1989 Anglo-American project whereby 'an imperial narrative in the school curriculum, contested though it would be, would keep alive the flame of the British empire'. History education expert, Terry Haydn's research (2012, 278-9) furthers such a view, suggesting that a new 'momentum' was given to such calls when the Conservative-led coalition government came to power in 2010.<sup>5</sup> However, where Yeandle's work shares with this thesis a common source of inspiration in Gove's reforms to the [English] National Curriculum for History, it diverges in terms of its focus. Where Yeandle explores the history of History teaching in the days before a government-mandated curriculum, what is explored here is the present-day situation, and whether the design of a History curriculum truly merits the degree of vigorous debate and discussion it receives.<sup>6</sup>

It might seem somewhat partial to focus on Michael Gove's views and reforms here, as none of his ideas on history education appear to be either unique or original and

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<sup>3</sup> The title of this role is, officially, Secretary of State for Education, and (though education is a matter devolved in the UK when it comes to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) the holder is generally-speaking a high-profile member of the UK Cabinet. Michael Gove served as [English] Education Secretary from 12 May 2010 to 15 July 2014.

<sup>4</sup> For a number of reasons, the terms "Britain" and "British" are used throughout this thesis, despite being technically inaccurate on occasion. However, accepting that there is no useful adjectival form for citizens of the UK, this thesis uses the terms "Britain" and "British" to refer adjectivally to the UK, its citizens and its empire throughout. The frequent use of "English" when discussing schools and education is not a misuse that presupposes England and Britain to be one and the same, but instead a positive affirmation of the devolved nature of the education systems within the constituent nations that comprise the modern UK.

<sup>5</sup> The coalition government (2010-2015) was primarily led by the UK Conservative Party (officially called the Conservative and Unionist Party – which is mentioned here only because of the resonance with themes of empire) but supported by members of the Liberal Democrats. There were always a number of Liberal Democrats in cabinet positions during the period 2010-2015, but the position of Education Secretary since 2010 and until the time of submission of this thesis (late June 2017), has been consistently held by a Conservative MP.

<sup>6</sup> This thesis uses the capitalised form of "History" to refer to the school subject, and the lowercase "history" in other instances.



the debates over what exactly should be taught in school History lessons have been fiercely contested by politicians across recent decades, and not just in the UK (Phillips, 1998; Taylor & Guyver, 2012; Guyver, 2011). However, as Education Secretary, Gove was the principal figure around whom the debate over imperial history in English schools coalesced during a period that also saw the most recent substantial overhaul of the National Curriculum for England more generally in secondary schools at Key Stage 3 (KS3), as well as qualifications at Key Stage 4 (KS4) and Key Stage 5 (KS5).<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it is important – briefly – to outline what it was that Gove envisaged which caused such divergence in opinion.

Gove put a great deal of emphasis on curriculum reform whereby the government would select the knowledge students should learn and then schools would transmit this knowledge to be uncritically ‘received’ by pupils (Young, 2011; Haydn, 2012, 279). The nature of this understanding of the utility of a curriculum will be explored in depth in the literature review section, but once again it is a belief that is far from unique to Gove, and is an understanding appropriated by many of the competing voices in the debate over the place of imperial history in schools. Beck (2012, 8) and Brocklehurst (2015, 57) suggests that some of Gove’s most ‘attention-grabbing’ policies were his insistence on students learning “facts” combined with a renewed emphasis on a more traditional “our island story” (nationalistic) version of History. Going further than this, Beck uses the work of Basil Bernstein to suggest that Gove’s vision for the curriculum was to shape a ‘prospective neoconservative pedagogic identity’ among England’s children and future citizens. Haydn (2012, 279) notes that Michael Gove’s preference for a transmitted “national narrative” version of British history, has been assigned a different rationale by some: that it might aid ‘social cohesion, in the increasingly multicultural and multi-ethnic Britain that has resulted from recent globalisation and migration trends’. Haydn (2012, 279) then goes on to cite Gove’s own words, which seem to merge both the ideas of shared identity (or even ideology) and social cohesion: ‘so every Briton can take pride in this nation’. Overall, the consensus perception of Gove’s aims for the curriculum were that it aimed to create a cohesive national narrative, of which British history would form a central part (and British *imperial* history a significant part), and that this narrative should be far more linear and detailed than that which had previously existed in English schools. However,

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<sup>7</sup> Key Stage 3 (Year 7-9, ages c.11-14); Key Stage 4 (Years 10-11, ages c.14-16); Key Stage 5 (Years 12-13, ages c.16-18). These are referred to within the thesis as KS3, KS4 and KS5.

for many of those who either supported or feared Gove's supposed "ideological" designs, there was also an implicit acceptance of Gove's idea of what a curriculum actually is: primarily, a knowledge transmission vehicle. Here one can also see the emergence of a disconnect between professional and public discourse on history education (Harris & Reynolds, 2014). Harris and Reynolds (2014, 464) argue that where educators often focus on 'developing students' understanding of history as a discipline' the public discourse often focuses upon 'the unifying capacity of history to foster a sense of national identity,' and therefore – to an extent – there emerge divergent conceptualisations of what a curriculum is and the amount of power its designers hold.

The idea that Gove sought to instil a powerful new national-narrative version of British history in English schools is hard to dispute, but the ends which he hoped to achieve by doing so are less certain. Journalist Seamus Milne (2010) cited the words of Colin Jones, president of the Royal Historical Society, in response to this idea of Gove's new national narrative, quite simply: "Which narrative?" Were Gove and his fellow Conservative Party members more interested in indoctrination, 'using the teaching of a 'national narrative' in school history to foster a sense of pride in the British nation among its individual citizens – from which they presume a sense of responsibility will naturally emerge' (Keating 2011, 761)? One recent study on the power of such "master narratives" points to the crux of the situation in the debate explored here: 'narrative can also simplify or obliterate what historical research reveals and thus limits historical understanding. A plot is selective and implies that some events are told, some characters are mentioned, whereas other are not' (Carretero & von Alphen, 2014, 291). Indeed, as Papadakis (2008, 128) notes, the propagation of a national narrative – especially in nations divided by "ethnonational conflicts" – 'is often used to propagate a narrative focusing on the suffering of the nation and to legitimate its political goals. The suffering of others is silenced, their historical existence is questioned, and sociocultural interactions are ignored'. The "power" that those both in support of and in opposition to a new narrative of British imperial history purport to believe in is the power of the narrative story. Yet, it is too often the "story" itself that gets the attention in the media/political discussion, and the roles of its narrator and audience (process/mediation) are often overlooked. Perhaps if schools did return to Victorian factories of rote-learning, where teachers communicated an agreed "story" verbatim to their students, and the students had modern technology (particularly the internet) stripped away from them, then perhaps this fear would be very real. But unless Britain

lurches back in time, or into a dystopian *1984*-style future, then such an assumption of the overwhelming power of a “national narrative” seems, it is argued here, somewhat overstated.

When it comes to creating a national historical master narrative, whatever its aims, politicians do not work entirely within a bubble, and Gove consulted a number of prominent historians before publishing the first draft of his new History curriculum in February 2013. Most notably, Gove invited Harvard historian Niall Ferguson to become involved in the early stages of its design. Ferguson has written widely on a number of topics, but some of his most notable (and bestselling) recent work has been on imperialism, the most pertinent here being his book, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, which was made into a Channel 4 documentary series that aired in 2003 (see Fleming, 2010). Ferguson’s well-publicised role in Gove’s reforms to the National Curriculum for History were soon seized upon by Gove’s various detractors as evidence of his supposed “plot” to brainwash the Millennials of England. It is certainly fair to say that Ferguson was a controversial choice, as – to many, if not most – his work is deemed as being “pro-imperial” (Porter, 2012, 23; Milne, 2010; Penny, 2010). In *Empire*, for example, Ferguson (2004, 370) concludes – not without qualification – that the rule of the British in their empire had, to a significant extent, a ‘benign’ effect.

It is not surprising that with a Gove-Ferguson combination, figures on the left of the political spectrum became wary. The *Guardian*’s Seamus Milne (2010) criticised the very idea of a “pro-imperial” historian being involved in ‘some of the most sensitive parts of the school syllabus’. Laurie Penny (2010), writing for the *New Statesman*, argued that it was clear that Gove’s consultation with Ferguson – ‘a poster-boy for big stories about big empire’ – was evidence that ‘The Tories [Conservative Party] want our children to be proud of Britain’s imperial past’. Penny not only identified Ferguson as a malign influence in this regard, but also the (perhaps more controversial) historian Andrew Roberts, whom, she advises her readers: ‘dined with South African white supremacists, defended the Amritsar Massacre and suggested that the Boers murdered in British concentration camps were killed by their own stupidity’. For Penny, Gove’s curriculum – when designed in partnership with such historians – would surely turn out to be ‘a bunting-and-bigotry party, heavy on the jelly and propaganda’ (Penny, 2010). Strong words indeed from Milne and Penny, yet both are known as media firebrands with their own ideological agendas. However, both Milne and Penny see the inevitable

result of Gove's reforms as a one-dimensional picture of British imperialism, both celebratory and inspirational, and this would in their general opinion be a bad thing.

Ferguson and Andrews were not the only historians Michael Gove consulted, even if his widening of the tent might have been somewhat reactionary. Historian Simon Schama became the preferred history "czar" in the later stages of the review process and belatedly others, such as David Cannadine, were consulted (Guyver, 2013a).<sup>8</sup> The involvement of these "big beasts" from the world of "History" attracted yet more attention to Gove's reforms. Yet, were academic historians the right people to consult? For Haydn (2012, 283), Gove's review focused too much on academic historians' views of how History should be taught in schools (with sympathy towards rote learning and national narratives) 'at the expense of history educationalists/didactics,' and the former group – though eminent in their own domains – might not be as well-placed as the latter to 'comment on effective modes of teaching'. Perhaps, then, there is more to creating a good history education than a band of renowned historians and Michael Gove writing a long list of content that should be covered.

Gove's draft proposals to reform the curriculum, published in February 2013, met with a storm of criticism, even from some of those consulted. Simon Schama described the curriculum as a 'ridiculous shopping list' of topics focusing on figures such as the 'sociopathic, corrupt thug' Clive of India (Hennessy, 2013). Cambridge historian, Richard Evans, felt that those who opposed Gove's February proposals, such as the Royal Historical Society and the Historical Association, were right to want an end to what he saw as Gove's attempt 'to use the teaching of history in schools to impart a tub-thumping English nationalism' (Evans, 2013b). Although some well-known historians, such as Ferguson, Antony Beevor and David Starkey, backed the February proposals, such was the weight of opinion against the nature of the draft that it led to a U-turn on the part of Gove when it came to the final publication of the History curriculum later that year (Hennessy, 2013). The lists of imperial events and figures to be studied were significantly reduced. Nevertheless, at the heart of the debate seemed to remain a tacit understanding on both "sides": if History teachers were to introduce the topics and figures outlined in Gove's draft curriculum, the students would become jingoistic, nationalistic, imperial yahoos. Whether this was the desired effect or not,

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<sup>8</sup> Cannadine's book, *The Right Kind of History* (2011), explores the history of History teaching.

both “sides” *seemed* to agree on the idea that a government-mandated curriculum document, plus teacher transmission, would equal eventual student understanding, and therefore whoever designed the curriculum document, there would be a party that rejected it. As Barton and Levstik (2004, 1) put it: ‘No one likes the way history is taught. Conservatives think it’s too multicultural, and multiculturalists think it’s too conservative. Politicians say it doesn’t promote patriotism, and social reformers say it doesn’t promote critical reflection’. Furthermore, the “debate” over the future of history education was carried out by ‘a mere smattering of politicians, educators and broadsheet media commentators’ like the “History Wars” that have taken place in numerous countries across the years, that Taylor and Guyver (2012, xi-xii) describe as ‘politicized controversies that frequently surround societal imaginings and depictions of national, cultural, racial, ethnic, tribal and religious pasts’. The really important question, to which many “History warriors” seem to assume the answer, is: do the students form their opinions on historical subjects simply from what they “learn” at school? It would seem likely that any secondary school teacher would answer in the negative, yet many of these “History warriors” appear to suggest the answer is “yes”.

Beyond the issue of what image/view of British imperial history students might be presented with in English schools – and whether this comes down to the list of topics they are required to study – another important question comes in the form of why this imperial history should be taught at all. For Cole (2004, 534), an ‘honest evaluation’ of imperialism needs to be reintroduced to British schools in order to at least make students aware of the implications and ramifications of racism (potentially a somewhat narrow focus); a choice, as he calls it, ‘between a continued enslavement by an ignorance of Britain’s imperial past or an empowered awareness of it’. Here there seems to be firmer ground for advocating the topic’s inclusion, echoing the ideas of “critical citizenship” outlined by Tosh (2008) and historian Anthony Seldon who argued that: ‘Studying the empire is important, because it is an international story, but we have to look at it from the perspective of those who were colonised as well as from the British perspective... We live in an interconnected world, and one has to balance learning about British history with learning about other cultures’ (Seldon cited in: Penny, 2010). Thus come to the fore some of the key reasons why British imperial history is so important. It is not that a one-dimensional presentation might be used to create a generation of neo-conservatives, but rather that a multi-dimensional exploration could be used to create a

generation who better appreciate Britain's complex past in order that they understand its interconnectivity with the present.

While all of these debates were taking place, journalist Jeremy Paxman authored a book entitled, *Empire: What Ruling the World Did to the British* (2011), and presented an accompanying BBC documentary series that aired in 2012. As such, Paxman was an obvious commentator for the press to turn to during the height of Gove's reforms. In one interview Paxman (2012) explained quite clearly why learning about British imperial history is so important. He argued that not teaching empire in schools was 'nothing short of a scandal' as it was the 'biggest international preoccupation of this country for generations'. He went on to outline several reasons to justify the place of British imperial history in schools, from helping to explain why Britain has a seat on the UN Security Council and British incursions overseas, to its importance in shaping the education system and the nature of post-war immigration. He argued for the teaching of imperial history not as a good thing or a bad thing, but as an *important* thing. As Paxman (2012) concluded: 'Perhaps if we acknowledged the vital role the empire played in our development, we'd understand ourselves a little better'. Indeed, the history of the British Empire offers an ideal way to present what educationalists suggest would help create a curriculum which Millennials can engage with: 'if we want a school history curriculum which connects with the interests and concerns of young people, we need a revised, globally situated and open history of nation-states, and a balancing of local, national, and global histories' (Grever, Pelzer & Haydn, 2011, 226). Just as these authors – in line with Cole (2004) – suggest, it is the idea of engaging with the interconnected, *complex* past that would 'empower' students to understand the present, to understand Britain and its relationships with the world from multiple perspectives – to this end, British imperial history could play a vital role.

One factor that has been hinted at when discussing storytelling and "master narratives" above, is that an important role often overlooked in popular debates is that of the teachers. After all, the media commentators seem to suggest that academic historians can have a nefarious effect on student understanding simply by being involved in a consultation process that will set out very broad guidelines. If one were to ask Niall Ferguson to teach a secondary school class for a year, few would doubt the impact of his views on student understanding, at least to some extent. Yet, what of the hundreds of History teachers across the nation and their divergent ideologies and understandings? Were Seamus Milne and Laurie Penny co-opted to teach an imperial

curriculum designed by Gove, Ferguson and Andrews – would the students come out as “tub-thumping nationalists” as they feared? Do teachers, therefore, control the sort of understanding students come away with when they finish their formal education in History at ages fourteen, sixteen or eighteen?<sup>9</sup> They certainly play some sort of role, and therefore they form an integral part of this study.

However, to focus on the teachers alone would be equally foolhardy, as they form the minority of those in the classroom. Here it is useful to begin with a simple yet important quotation from the educationalists Barton and Levstik (2004, 17): ‘People do not simply construct historical knowledge on their own; they do so as part of one or more social groups’. For these authors, based on their research in schools, students were part of ‘multiple communities of historical learning,’ and had begun constructing their ideas about history long before History lessons in school. Barton and Levstik’s students identified such sources of information as electronic media, television programmes, comic books, objects like baseball trading cards, family trips to museums or historic sites, and, most often, relatives. Perhaps, it seems, there is more to historical understanding than simple transmission of facts, even via mediation through a teacher. For these authors, as this study also argues, to suggest that students’ historical perceptions are primarily influenced by what they learn in the classroom is certainly not a given, and even within the classroom there are a multitude of other variables that need to be taken into consideration.

With this in mind, the matter of teaching imperial history (or for that matter *any* history) becomes ever more complex and multi-layered. If one accepts the multiplicity of conscious and unconscious influences on students’ historical understanding, why look at the teaching of British imperial history at all? Because, as mentioned already, teaching imperial history has the potential to create a more enlightened citizenship, that understands the nature of twenty-first century Britain’s complex past and how this is inextricably linked to its equally complex present – at least in theory. For teachers, the intended benefit of this study is to help better understand how one’s teaching, and the content that one covers, impacts upon student learning and understanding, and potentially, therefore, how it might be improved. For others, this thesis seeks to show once and for all that the question of the exact wording of the National Curriculum for

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<sup>9</sup> In England, students generally study History until the end of Key Stage 3 (aged 14), after which point it is an optional subject to study for Key Stage 4 (where most students complete around ten different subject-focused GCSE qualifications at 16), and at Key Stage 5 (where most students study three subjects for A Level qualifications at 18).

History is far less important than we are often led to believe by “History warriors” in the realms of politics and the media. This study, therefore, seeks to address a number of audiences when it looks to answer the following key questions:

1. Is it important for students in English schools to learn about British imperial history in school in the twenty-first century?
2. To what extent can/do History teachers mediate and thereby alter student perspectives of British imperial history?
3. Are students’ views on British imperialism more a product of the classroom or of external, extra-curricular influences?

When I began this project, the dominant views that I encountered seemed to offer some answers already. For the first question, the general consensus was that it was important to learn about imperial history, but this was almost always followed by a caveat outlining what ideological narrative the “story” should take. For the second, the overwhelming “History warrior” view seemed to ignore these factors almost entirely, for them the government, their advisors and the curriculum designers held the reins on this “power”. As to the final question, the suggestion in the mainstream “History warrior” debate seemed to suggest that students could be readily indoctrinated by the history they were taught in school, suggesting that it played a formative role in shaping students’ views. What the findings of this thesis show is that these answers are only partially correct. The first question has indeed been answered correctly (to a point) – it is certainly important for students today to learn about British imperial history, though this study does show that even one united classroom experience does not produce one unified understanding. Indeed, this study also shows that teachers and external/extra-curricular factors play a far greater role than many of the commentators here often imply. This chimes with the comments by Voss and Wiley (1997, 148-149), considering the potentially powerful influence of what they term “out-of-school” versions of History.

Chapter 2, immediately following this introduction, explores some of the debates and issues raised above, in a more thematic and less media-centric manner, focused on the existing literature across a range of fields, but mainly in the social sciences. It will consider debates over the nature of a “curriculum,” as well as issues such as historical significance, mediation and identity – themes that have vast literatures which touch upon the teaching of imperial history in a variety of ways. Chapter 3 sets



out the methodology of this particular study, beginning with its ontological and epistemological roots, before moving on to outline the research methods designed to explore the questions raised above.

Chapter 4 (discussion) and Chapter 5 (analysis) present and analyse the huge amounts of qualitative data collected in this study, exploring it on a level whereby the student and teacher voices are not lost, but also connecting it closely to the ideas and issues raised in the preceding chapters. Using questionnaires, focus group interviews and one-on-one interviews, these chapters bring the big debates back into the classroom, debates that too often take place, as Haydn and Harris (2010, 254-255) put it, over the heads of those who are most affected. The final chapter then returns to the issues raised in this introduction to summarise what impact this thesis might have on the future of teaching British imperialism in English schools.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In line with the key questions raised in the above introduction, and combined with an understanding of the multiple issues raised in the existing debates about the place of British imperial history in English schools in the twenty-first century, the following chapter is subdivided into several thematic (though often interconnected) sections, each of which deals with a substantive and pertinent issue that has an impact upon history education. Firstly, it deals with the idea of a curriculum, the power that curriculum designers have in the process of teaching and learning history, and how far designing an imperial history (written) curriculum is significant when it comes to the broader theme of student understanding. Secondly, the review explores the idea of “significance” in History, a subject that has been the focus of debate for a number of years and is central to many of the concerns raised in this thesis. Next, the literature review moves on to the issue of mediation and the extent to which this plays a role in students’ understanding of history, and specifically how this might impact upon their understanding of British imperial history. Finally, the review turns to the issue of “identity”. For many commentators – explored both in the introduction and below – History holds an almost uniquely important place in helping young people form a sense of identity, and particularly a “national” identity. This section will consider the extent to which studies have found this to be true and how significant British imperial history might prove to be in the formation of students’ identities. For example, does a focus on imperial history serve to broaden student understanding of twenty-first century Britain or instead serve to narrow their focus onto a glorified or vilified past to divisive ends, and how does all of this impact upon student identity? Together these themes unite to target the key questions at the heart of this study, and to explore what academics across the fields of Education and History see (either directly or indirectly) as the place and potential of British imperial history in twenty-first century History classrooms in England.<sup>10</sup>

### **2.1 Imperial History and the “Curriculum”**

The data used in this study is drawn from KS5 students (aged 16-18) who were not affected directly by reforms to the KS3 curriculum (11-14). However, the debate discussed below that pertained primarily to KS3, was far more about the wider importance of imperial history in schools than at which age it was studied. As discussed

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<sup>10</sup> Many passages in this chapter have been published in a different format as: Burns (2014).

later, in more detail, at KS3 the curriculum was (prior to reform in 2013), and has remained, open to substantial room for interpretation. Also, independent schools and academies, to name but a couple of types of English educational provider, do not have to adhere to the already malleable National Curriculum at all. Given that there are a number of in-class and out-of-class variables to take into consideration when gauging how students come to form ideas about British imperialism, it was important to gain some common ground across the sites studied here in order to make comparisons and contrasts more telling (see earlier discussion of Barton & Levstik, 2004), and this was simply not possible at KS3. Therefore, KS5 was selected because it offered the chance for schools to select British imperialism as a topic for in-depth study, allowing me to select sites that studied for the same national examinations and therefore covered common core content and skills. Regardless of the stage at which they study it – though this in itself is perhaps a discussion for another thesis – the national debate about imperial history in the KS3 curriculum was not really about age, it was about what effects learning imperial history had on students, and for this reason, it is integral to both explaining and justifying the significance of this study. The KS3 curriculum debate is also crucial in addressing a key assumption that this study seeks to question: how far the specific content studied has an impact on students' general understanding of British imperialism.

Back in February 2013 the government issued a consultation document for proposed changes to the History curriculum for England. The report identified the aims of history education as follows (DfE, 2013a, 166): 'A high-quality history education equips pupils to think critically, weigh evidence, sift arguments, and develop perspective and judgement. A knowledge of Britain's past, and our place in the world, helps us understand the challenges of our own time'. The Historical Association (2013) almost immediately responded on their website by suggesting that 'to try and teach the content listed in any meaningful way would require a vast expansion of history teaching time. This is a high speed superficial tour rather than the old fashioned grand tour'. Actually, in terms of modern history, what the February proposals outlined for Key Stage 3 (Years 7-9) was far more in depth than what eventually resulted in the July 2013 framework (which matches what was eventually republished in December 2014, the most up-to-date at the time of writing). Even a cursory glance over the February and July 2013 outlines for Key Stage 3 History (Appendices 1 and 2) show an incredible change in prescribed content.

Gove's February proposals met with a great deal of criticism, and groups such as the Historical Association, Royal Historical Society and British Academy complained that: 'details of the [new] curriculum have been drafted inside the Department for Education without any systematic consultation or public discussion with historians, teachers or the wider public' (Evans, 2013a). An online poll by the Historical Association found that only 4% of those surveyed saw the February proposals as a positive change, while 96% found it too prescriptive (Mansell, 2013). For historians such as Richard Evans, it appeared that even those historians (controversial or not) that Gove had consulted were ultimately ignored, with Gove instead writing 'his own' History curriculum, with its lists and a chronological emphasis 'not appropriate to the ages being taught' (Evans, 2013a). This 'barrage of criticism' certainly played a part in the chronological shake-up between the February proposals and those finally published in July 2013 (Guyver, 2013b).

In terms of mandatory imperial history, the huge expansion in the chronology to be tackled at KS3 – between the February and July 2013 curriculum drafts – inevitably created a squeeze. This chronological shift meant that, while under the February outline students would have had three years to cover the period from 1707 to 1989 (c.300 years of history) – also very much the conventional span of British imperial history – by the time of the July outline students would instead cover the period 1066-1989 (c.900 years of history) in those same three years of teaching. Indeed, this change means in effect that instead of students spending three years on a period where imperial history plays a major role, they are likely to restrict it to Year 9 (only one year of teaching). As one report on the changes mentioned, the specific study of various key individuals from Winston Churchill to Olaudah Equiano was removed, and certainly: 'There is also no space for the empire figures General James Wolfe or Clive of India' (Mansell, 2013). This last point is particularly telling and, when one looks at the February and July curriculums, what was a substantial compulsory – and specific – role for imperial history in February was relegated to far more generalist bullet points in the July (and final) versions. In theory empire could still be a big focus, as half of the outline KS3 bullet points seem to touch on "empire" either directly or indirectly, in references such as 'how Britain has influenced and been influenced by the wider world,' 'the expansion and dissolution of empires,' and 'abstract terms such as 'empire'' (DfE, 2013b).

Yet, this coverage is far more flexible – "optional" even – meaning that coverage was not only squeezed from three years to one at KS3, but now would have to

fight for its position in that single year with other important topics such as the industrial revolution, both world wars and the Holocaust. Admittedly, the July outline looked far more like the pre-Gove curriculum (in the c.900-year coverage at KS3) than the proposed February outline, so in real terms the change was not all that great. Aside from chronology, as the Mansell (2013) extract above also notes, there was a reduction in specific figures and events listed (see Appendices 1 and 2 for details of content in both curriculums). Gone were some of the more “traditional” inclusions (Clive of India, Indian Mutiny, Boer Wars), along with some of the more “modern” specifics (Wind of Change, Windrush generation, Commonwealth immigration). In addition, instead of noting that students *should* be taught *all* of the following in the February draft, by July the listed content was advisory and the curriculum noted that the specified content was ‘non-statutory’ (DfE, 2013b). Though the vaguer and more flexible lists of the July 2013 curriculum do not rule out coverage of Gove’s preferred February subject matter, the likelihood is that little of it will be covered under a far more pressured year, rather than over a far more generous three years. The critics of Gove might not have removed everything they disliked, but they certainly scored some significant victories – and one of the main casualties was British imperial history.

### **2.1.1 What is a Curriculum?**

Before looking more closely into the possible motivations behind including imperial history in the curriculum, one must first consider the ever-evolving literature on the concept of the curriculum itself. The UK government (House of Commons, 2009, 9) sees the National Curriculum for England as setting out ‘the body of knowledge, skills and understanding that a society wishes to pass on to its children and young people’.<sup>11</sup> But is this how everybody understands a curriculum? For many of the commentators discussed above, this definition would be sufficient, although the focus under the coalition and Conservative government reforms (2010-2017) seems to have been less on skills and more on the body of knowledge (content) and understanding. Whatever the focus, there are more elements to a curriculum than the government outline suggests.

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<sup>11</sup> As noted earlier, Education in the UK is a devolved area. However, there is no “English government” (as there are Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish governments) and so the decisions that impact only upon England are still made by the UK government and (where necessary) enacted by the UK parliament. A factor often noted in debates over the issue of introducing (and subsequently raising) university tuition fees (relating to England) on which non-English MPs are entitled to vote. This issue is part of what is known as the West Lothian question.

Smith (2000) outlines *four* key approaches to curriculum theory and practice, whereas the UK government aims seem to consider primarily the first two approaches (and particularly the first):

1. Curriculum as a body of knowledge to be **transmitted**
2. Curriculum as an attempt to achieve certain ends in students – **product**
3. Curriculum as **process**
4. Curriculum as **praxis** [emphasis in original]

Smith (2000) argues that some curriculum planners still equate a curriculum to a syllabus – as in his first point – and their primary consideration is ‘the body of knowledge that they wish to transmit’. This is essentially the ‘technical paradigm’ that views knowledge as ‘objective, abstract and independent of time and place’ and where this knowledge is ‘value free and comes neatly packaged in subjects’ (Gleeson, 2010, 2). As numerous authors note, Gove put a great deal of emphasis on curriculum reform whereby the government selects the knowledge students should learn and the schools were to “transmit” this knowledge (Young, 2011; Beck, 2012; Haydn, 2012). Indeed, as Counsell (2011, 220) argues, there is a danger that subjects, such as History, are often regarded by senior managers as ‘information’ rather than ‘ways of knowing’. In line with these senior managers, many observers see Gove (as a curriculum designer) as heavily slanted towards an understanding of curriculum as a body of knowledge to be transmitted, especially when it comes to History.

The second key approach identified by Smith (2000) – curriculum as product – focuses upon learning objectives and outcomes, vocationalism and key competencies. This approach differs from the first in that its core concerns are the development and measurement of (often vocational/generic) *skills* for use in life after formal education, rather than *knowledge*. For Lee (2011, 64) the polarisation of “knowledge” and “skills” is a disastrous development that ignores the nature of the subject, but it is nevertheless a polarity that exists in the eyes of many curriculum designers. Cave (2002), looking particularly at the teaching of imperial history, sees the key difference between a content-based and a skills-based curriculum as one of “breadth” and “depth”. He feels that the UK Labour government’s embrace of “skills” (source-work and interpretation) at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (related to the New History lobby and the Schools History Project), when compared to Japanese schools’ focus on teaching facts, allowed English pupils to examine imperial issues in more depth. One might question whether, with a renewed focus on “facts” in Britain since the Conservative-led coalition of 2010-2015,

such depth will be lost and to what end? However, in a skills-based curriculum, it is also harder to ascertain the importance of imperial history above any other form of History as the skills and competencies produced would unlikely be affected directly. Overall, in both of the content- and skills-centric models, the curriculum designer seems to expect that their input will produce a certain outcome – in either skills or understanding, but as Cornbleth (1990, cited in: Gleeson 2010, 373) notes, in such models ‘curriculum developers are not responsible for the education made available to students, and attention is directed to the curriculum document rather than to classroom practice’.

However, though many debates worldwide tend to centre on content and skills, as Chapman (2015, 31) argues, this is a somewhat unhelpful dichotomy that only really serves to obfuscate the nature of the History curriculum. As Smith’s (2000) article continues, he moves on from models that see the curriculum as ‘a set of documents for implementation’ to see “curriculum” instead as ‘the interaction of teachers, students and knowledge’. Here Smith looks at alternatives such as the third and fourth approaches on his list. “Curriculum as process” – where Smith borrows largely from Stenhouse (1975) – might be summarised as a refocusing of attention onto the process of learning. Given that this emphasises ‘interpretation and meaning-making’ by students, Smith goes on to suggest that very different means may be employed in different classrooms leading to a ‘high degree of variety in content’. Smith notes that, in this situation, the teacher is centrally concerned with the learning process, making the students subjects – rather than objects – of the process. Although the government description of aiming to produce “understanding” seems to link with this idea of a curriculum as a “process,” this interpretation is very much in the eye of the beholder. As many of the debates explored here show, both advocates and critics of Gove’s February 2013 curriculum draft appeared to equate the students’ understanding (outcome) with the input (body of knowledge – or “facts”). Instead, as McKernan (2008, 94) notes, a ‘process-inquiry’ model puts ‘depth of understanding’ ahead of ‘the recitation of trivial facts,’ with the teachers and students – in his model at least – paying close attention to the principles and procedures implicit in the ways of doing each subject. For McKernan, governments tend to take the narrower (and perhaps more traditionalist) view of a curriculum: focused on a controllable outcome, rather than as a dynamic process. As a result, the national debate in the media also tends to focus on a narrow understanding of a curriculum, rather than the complex interplay of mediation, reflection and the development of a deeper understanding.

The final approach Smith (2000) outlines is “curriculum as praxis” which builds on the process model. The praxis model brings ‘informed, committed action’ into the process and this also raises issues that start to engage with the place of imperial history in the curriculum. In the praxis model, teachers act not as ‘fountains of information’ but as ‘reflective facilitators of learning who depend on their professional judgement to interpret the curriculum as text, while “denying the authority of the syllabus to impose its own meaning”’ (Gleeson, 2010, 4). By studying – for example – the history of British colonisation in West Africa, students could explore the cultural, racial differences/experiences of the groups involved, see why they differed (at the time and over time) resulting in a greater understanding of collective, rather than individual, attitudes. In both the “process” and the “praxis” model, the views and aims of the teacher/educator are fundamental – as are those of the learner – and, again, these suggest important lines of investigation in terms of mediation of information and how understandings of British imperialism are formed beyond the narrow confines of a written curriculum. In both of these latter approaches the curriculum is seen as an evolving process where learning is an active and experimental process and not (as is the case with the first approach) the simple transmission and memorisation of ideas.

What briefly outlining the four models overviewed by Smith (2000) shows is that there is far from one understanding of what a curriculum is and what a curriculum is for. Most evidence suggests that Gove’s reforms were based on a somewhat narrow view of the curriculum as knowledge to be transmitted, but what the wider literature shows is that such a narrow reading of curriculum is flawed. Educationalists are very aware that a curriculum is more than simply a list to be learned, but instead that it is a dynamic and evolving process that is unlikely to create a uniform understanding or experience. Indeed, the teachers interviewed in this study certainly seem to adopt the latter understanding, and the student questionnaires and focus groups seem to suggest that uniformity of understanding is certainly not the likely result of studying the same specified content.

### **2.1.2 An “International” Curriculum**

A number of recent studies consider the aims of policymakers in determining the content of school curriculums. Osberg and Biesta (2008, 314-315), for example, contend that, for many policymakers, the curriculum ‘becomes a course by means of



which the subjectivity of those being educated is directed in some way'. For a politically-based education policymaker, as the previous paragraph suggests, this might well be the central aim – “reassuring” an MP’s constituents, supporters and the sympathetic general electorate that what students are learning is something the government has control over. The aims of Michael Gove seemed to be relatively clear, as he told the BBC on 20 January 2013: ‘I’m not going to be coming up with any prescriptive lists, I just think there should be facts’ (BBC News, 2013). In response, a number of leading historians including Cambridge Professor Richard Evans, criticised Gove’s “facts” as ‘a return to rote learning of the patriotic stocking-fillers so beloved of traditionalists’ (Ferguson, 2013). The article citing the words of Professor Evans was written by historian Niall Ferguson who, as the article’s title suggests, thinks Gove’s proposed changes to the curriculum were broadly laudable. With such continuing dissonance between both historians and policymakers as to whether Gove’s changes were for the good of education, one might be led to wonder whether such debates can ever be resolved. Gilbert (2011, 246) notes that there are many competing voices and ideals regarding what History in schools should be about, and for politicians ‘history is a tool of policy aimed at establishing national ethos and order, and a field of skirmishes in culture wars’. Interestingly, Gilbert’s article focuses on the debates over the History curriculum in Australia, not the UK, yet one cannot help but see the obvious parallels. Gilbert notes the tensions between seeing History’s goal as providing a structured narrative from which to formulate identity and a skills-based approach, respectively championed by two recent Australian PMs John Howard and Kevin Rudd (Gilbert, 2011). If refocusing the nature of the History curriculum is controversial in the UK, it is certainly not something that affects England uniquely.

Gilbert is not alone in studying debates similar to those that have recently taken place in England, and Australia has perhaps come under some of the best academic scrutiny in the last decade (Guyver, 2011; Parkes, 2007; Clark, 2009). Aside from England and Australia, an array of studies from across the globe have also considered “political” reforms to school History curriculums and the challenges and controversies that have flowed from such reforms. These debates frequently credit written curriculum designers with great power, often to subvert or (re)tell a national narrative along political or ideological lines. For Clark (2009, 759), though most people can accept that knowledge of one’s national history is important (and often lacking), most educators, students and curriculum officials she surveyed did not want a ‘simple and uplifting

national history’ but rather ‘classes that engage and challenge them beyond any recitation of the “nation’s story”’. Clark (2009, 759) argues not that a national narrative is not important, but that such a narrative should reflect ‘the complexity of the subject itself’.

Taiwan is well-placed as a territory/nation that has a real weight of political/ideological baggage to deal with from its recent history and, given its geopolitical situation, would certainly need to consider deeply how to relate the events of Taiwanese, Chinese and world history to twenty-first century students. As Hsiao-Lan (2008, 96-97) puts it, ‘Because historical knowledge itself has an epistemological and ideological basis, the reconstruction of the history curriculum became controversial to a level beyond what the Task Force Committee could have imagined,’ before going on to suggest that resulting fights over content and interpretations might well have been ‘attempts to control definitions of the past designed to justify political positions, and to promote particular cultural and national identities’. The Taiwanese debate was not all that far removed from the arenas of debate that surrounded Gove’s consultation of “pro-imperial” historians in his consultations: ‘Although imperialist, Euro-centric, and Sino-centric history, because of its obvious biases and overt political agenda, is now discredited in many academic circles, the reconstructed [Taiwan] high school history curriculum guidelines were controversially accepted by some historians but not by many others’ (Hsiao-Lan 2008, 96). It all sounds remarkably familiar. Hsiao-Lan (2008, 99) observes both that ‘the actual teaching and learning of history in classrooms is viewed by educators in a radically different way than by historians’ but also that it was the historians and not the educators who ‘were in charge of the selection of the historical content and the organization of the curriculum structure’ in Taiwan. Teachers and educationalists, Hsiao-Lan (2008, 99) contends, were left simply to “reify” the stated aims of skills and competencies. This certainly has echoes of Haydn’s (2012, 283) suggestions in the English context, that perhaps Michael Gove’s reforms focused too much on academic historians’ advice, ahead of that of history educationalists, when it came to creating his National Curriculum for History.

Critiques over the sort of “lists” of people and events included in the National Curriculum for History in England that Gove proposed in his February draft, were at the heart of what many saw at the political/ideological aims of his curriculum, and these also have clear international parallels. Following reforms to the History and Social Studies curriculum in the US Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 2003, many

educators criticised the lack of focus on historical and critical thinking skills while the new curriculum seemed to place increased stress on content. In addition to this many teachers felt that these changes were ‘politically motivated and reflected the conservative ideology framework of its authors’ (Martell, 2010, 5). Texas, the second most populous and arguably most influential state when it comes to producing educational materials in the United States, has more recently seen curriculum reforms in Social Studies and History. To an extent the debate reflected the ongoing “culture wars” that besiege the US political scene, hinted at in the Massachusetts teachers’ perceptions noted above. In line with Gove’s overhaul of the curriculum, the Texas state government of the day was from the more conservative side of the political spectrum, while criticism came largely from the more “liberal” wing of society/politics. Just as with Gove’s “lists,” (and in the case of Massachusetts noted above) the content of what was “included/excluded” from the curriculum became a focal point of debates over the Texan curriculum reforms. As two teachers involved in the Texas curriculum debate conceded: ‘Our inability to reconcile these different visions of “history,” including our own historical experiences, emerged in the inconsistent emphasis on certain types of themes, people and events throughout the standards’ (Muñoz & Noboa, 2012, 54). Though the US might seem to provide some easy political parallels with the UK, Ismailova (2004, 250) notes the difficulties facing History curriculum reform in a country as politically removed from the UK as post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan: ‘Curriculum does not just neutrally represent the knowledge that unquestionably corresponds to the real things in the world. It reflects a broader political, ideological and socio-cultural context, within which it is developed’. Changing the History curriculum was not simply a problem for Michael Gove, it is a conundrum that challenges governments of all political persuasions across the globe.

If British (national) imperial history should be included in a revised English curriculum one might then ask whether it is included to help learners understand today’s society or to celebrate a bygone era (though, of course, such a black and white division lacks the necessary subtlety). Christou (2007, 711) notes that ‘national history curricula tend to propagate a nation’s desirable vision of itself and minimize any references to its ‘dark pages’ in history’. The author points to a recent controversy over a Japanese textbook that critics suggested marginalised Japan’s violent imperial past. Looking at ideas such as this, yet more questions are raised over what might be achieved by including British imperial history on an English curriculum – if imperialism is taught

and a national narrative is to be created, will the retelling of imperial history really delve into the “dark pages” of our own national history? If this were to be the case, one might consider again the suggestions of Parmar (2010) – that the government’s true aim might be to keep the flame of empire alive – or Beck (2012) – that it might be aimed at creating a future generation of neoconservatives. Even if a government prescribes subject matter, can they ever really know how it will be taught or received by students – or how widely such experiences might differ from place to place?

### **2.1.3 A Less “National” Curriculum**

The National Curriculum for History discussed above does not really live up to its name on a number of levels. Firstly, the UK, the nation-state that the Westminster government is elected to represent, is not responsible for education policy in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, where education is devolved to sub-national legislatures and governments. So the “National Curriculum” created by the UK government applies only in England, but increasingly it does not apply to what will – under current government plans – ultimately be the vast majority of schools even in England. Independent (private or public) schools have traditionally been almost unique in that they were/are free to ignore government changes to the National Curriculum, which does/did not apply to them. However, increasingly state (maintained) schools are also exempt. Both “free schools” and “academies” (forms of independent, state-funded schools), do not have to follow the National Curriculum. By May 2016, almost two-thirds of secondary schools had become academies, under a scheme introduced by a Labour government (Learning and Skills Act, 2000), but dramatically scaled up by the coalition and Conservative governments since 2010. The Conservative government (from 2015) outlined a commitment to have all schools (primary and secondary) in England become academies between 2020 and 2022 (BBC News, 2016). Therefore, in effect, by 2020-22 the National Curriculum will effectively become obsolete. Thus, though it has been and remains for the time being, an important document, capable of raising the sorts of debates detailed in the introduction, to focus on the National Curriculum might prove a little short-sighted for a study such as this. Indeed, it was not just subject matter and chronology that were mentioned as influences on Gove’s “measured retreat” from his February to the July 2013 curriculum outline. One commentator pointed to the increase in academies as a factor in the decision: ‘Because of the academy programme, it is

difficult for them [the Department for Education] to say to one set of schools “do what you like” and to another “follow this incredibly detailed programme of study”. They’ve had to give more flexibility’ (Mansell, 2013).

As a result, this study has chosen to focus on Key Stage 5 (KS5 – Years 12 and 13), where – though even the syllabuses for exams explored here have been replaced as of summer 2016 – students still have to follow schemes of work to pass national examinations in England in order to attain an A Level in History. So long as there exists a national exam, where students are required to study a specified syllabus of content and skills (akin to how the UK government seem to regard a curriculum) in order to achieve a good grade, so schools will teach the specified content with far greater likelihood of faithful coverage than in a set of vague bullet points not followed by around two-thirds of schools at KS3.

## **2.2 Significance**

One of the most persistent puzzles for those framing a History curriculum is what content is to be included. Even if one were to follow only Michael Gove’s “island story” narrative of British history (and not the more international concessions that were added later), how does one break down over 900 years of British history and fit this into three years at the rate of a couple of hours per week? One way of selecting content is by significance – a loaded term indeed – and one that has been discussed by many historians and thinkers across the years. History itself, not simply the subject matter selected for study in schools, is, as E. H. Carr (1990, 138) put it, ‘a process of selection in terms of historical significance... Just as from the infinite ocean of facts the historian selects those which are significant for his purpose, so from the multiplicity of sequences of cause and effect he extracts those, and only those, which are historically significant; and the standard of historical significance is his ability to fit them into his pattern of rational explanation and interpretation’.

Again, this debate is not limited to England, but stretches internationally. As Lévesque (2005, 1) notes, in Canada, the ‘implicit message’ has traditionally been that ‘historical significance’ and what should be taught in schools as a result ‘should be ascribed to white middle- and upper-class British males in positions of power or authority’. Yet, though the individuals involved in the process of education (as discussed in the section above) bring with them their own ‘mental framework of

historical significance' there is still some space for curriculum/syllabus designers to make distinctions between what is significant or "trivial" (Lévesque, 2005, 2). The idea of significance is often deeply embedded in the design of a curriculum (or an A Level specification for the sake of this study). In advice taken from a number of different studies, and aimed at getting students to assess significance in the History classroom, Kitson and Husbands (2011, 85) give a useful list of factors that could be considered to assess significance, and here might be as well employed to assess whether imperial history fits the bill. Below are repeated four sets of criteria by which significance might be assessed (all listed in: Kitson & Husbands, 2011, 85-86):

1. Partington (1986)
  - a. Importance – *at the time*
  - b. Profundity – *how deeply people's lives were affected*
  - c. Quantity – *how many lives were affected*
  - d. Durability – *for how long people's lives were affected*
  - e. Relevance – *how the event has helped us to understand the present*
2. Phillips (2002)
  - a. Groundbreaking
  - b. Remembered by all
  - c. Events that were far reaching
  - d. Affected the future
  - e. Terrifying
3. Dawson (2003)
 

*A person might be deemed significant if she/he:*

  - a. Changed events at the time they lived
  - b. Improved lots of lives or made them worse
  - c. Changes people's ideas
  - d. Had a long-lasting impact on their country or on the world
  - e. Had been a really good/bad example to people of how to live
4. Counsell (2004)
  - a. Remarkable – *remarked upon at the time or since*
  - b. Remembered
  - c. Resonant – *some connection to lives today*
  - d. Resulting in change
  - e. Revealing – *helps us to understand other things about the past*

In these various models, British imperial history would seem to rate quite highly. As a topic it undoubtedly influenced a great many peoples' lives over a sustained period of time (for better or worse) and resulted in changes both to individual lives and the shape of nations across the world. British imperial history had a strong impact not only on English and British history but inter/transnational history. Yet, though it scores highly

(if admittedly by the unscientific means employed in this paragraph) by various scales, many other subjects also score equally highly, and the question becomes not simply whether British imperial history is significant, but whether it is worthy of selection ahead of other subjects.

One solution to this problem is not to theorise too broadly, but to consult the students themselves and see what they want to see more (or less) of in the curriculum. In so doing, using survey and focus group data drawn from a small-scale study of two secondary schools, Harris and Reynolds (2014, 484) concluded that students wanted ‘more than the current curriculum is offering’. They suggest that there is a call from both majority and minority ethnic students, to study a ‘more diverse past both in terms of geographical spread, types of history and historical perspectives,’ and from some to understand their own backgrounds better. They suggest, along with greater focus on local history, such a revision could be combined with a transnational theme, such as migration, which together could help students develop ‘a more inclusive sense of a collective local identity’ (Harris & Reynolds, 2014, 484). The British Empire – as a subject – would also seem to fit this mould rather well, allowing students to assess their locality’s/localities’ role in British imperialism (either directly or indirectly), as well as how global migration (at least so far as it is related to empire and decolonisation) might help elucidate the recent past (and present) of where they live. British imperialism, after all, was not simply an external phenomenon that occurred overseas, but also “happened” in Britain and fundamentally altered and shaped the nature of the United Kingdom and its citizens. It is a theme that is both inclusive of English and British histories (and local histories) while also being truly transnational in its scope. Cercadillo (2001, 116) observes that “‘Significance’ is at the heart of the subject matter of both academic and school history’. Cercadillo’s (2001, 141) study comparing students’ perceptions of historical significance in England and Spain suggests that most students ‘justify the significance of an occurrence in history in casual terms, by an appeal to the consequences of that occurrence. In younger students (in both countries), there is a strong tendency to assess significance exclusively in contemporary terms’. Although this was not the only conclusion Cercadillo drew, it follows on from what Harris and Reynolds (2014) suggest about students wanting to be able to form a present-day connection with what they learn, and again suggests British imperialism has great potential as a topic to engage students who see value in contemporary resonance.

In a recent article for the *Telegraph*, Jeremy Paxman made a case for teaching the history of the British Empire that focused heavily on significance through contemporary resonance:

[It] explains so much about who we are now... Imperial history explains both why Britain has a seat on the UN Security Council and the readiness of British prime ministers to commit British troops to overseas wars. But it goes much further, too. The empire reshaped our education system and redefined how we think of ourselves. It was the trigger for much post-war immigration, and anything that changes the very genetic make-up of the population can hardly be dismissed as superficial (Paxman, 2012).

Such ideas echo those of history education experts, such as Chapman (2015, 35) who notes the importance of History as a subject more generally in helping students to ‘think and understand the world in which they live’. However, Paxman also suggests that empire is unfairly characterised as a bad thing, an idea, it is argued here, that is shared by Michael Gove and one that raises ever more questions regarding the nature of why and how one teaches imperial history. Seixas (2005, 143) notes that the very idea of “significance” is fraught with complications: he asks whether, in a post-feminist world where multiple voices are embraced, it follows that ‘*anything*’ can be seen as significant? Even if the British Empire is significant – which parts of it should one teach? Ever since the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978, the idea of Western imperialists’ views of their imperial subjects and the formation of stereotypical “otherness” has created much debate and discussion among historians. As Macfie (2002, 96) notes, Said and other theorists (such as Abdel-Malek) generally concur that Orientalist views of the East were generally used in the service of empire. If this was the traditional nature of the presentation of those subjected to imperial rule – how is the repetition of similar stereotyping to be avoided in the future? Just as the question lingers of what is significant and should be selected from Britain’s vast and sprawling imperial history, so does the question of how this selected content is delivered and understood.

### **2.3 Mediation**

What many of the above discussions seem to accept is the power of the History curriculum – as a document – to colour/distort student understanding. Though the written curriculum’s effects should not be discounted, one must be careful not to deny both teachers and students agency in the educational process (in line with the



process/praxis views of a curriculum). Firstly, teachers – at least in the UK – *do* have agency and relative freedom within the classroom. Secondly, students are not a homogenous mass that are passively instructed. Standpoint theory, for example, suggests that to understand how an individual experiences or learns something, it is not enough to explore social conditions, role expectations or gendered definitions, but the ‘distinctive ways individuals construct those conditions and their experiences within them,’ and that – to an extent – ‘all knowing is merely *relative* to the standpoint of the knower’ (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, 92; Edwards, 2014, 169). Indeed, as Edwards (2014, 172) notes, this would mean that in spite of ‘the ambitions of a prescribed curriculum or syllabus, epistemological form will vary according to the learners’ social location or *standpoint*’. Such a view is essential to understanding the dramatically incomplete picture that is drawn by those who fear, or purport to fear, the power of the written curriculum on the nature of student learning – at the very least in a liberal democratic society such as the United Kingdom (and England specifically). This theoretical standpoint fits well with research by scholars such as Epstein and Shiller (2005, 201) who argue that although standards or curriculums can be mapped out at a state or national level mandating ‘what young people need to know about history, government and other social studies subjects... they do not provide information on what young people actually know and believe about a subject’. They continue:

The perspectives or frameworks of knowledge and beliefs [akin to standpoints] that young people bring to their social studies lessons are significant not only because they can serve as a scaffold or springboard for learning, but also because they serve as filters through which teaching, subject matter, and learning must pass.

Indeed, as this short overview outlines, the idea that knowledge transmitted in the classroom might at best have a secondary impact on student understanding and interpretation of history has been borne out in a variety of studies. For example, Epstein’s (2000, 186) study into African-American students’ understanding of history – particularly regarding “race” – makes clear her contention that ‘young people of different racial and ethnic identities have their own ideas,’ and these ideas are shaped by their own experiences, those of family and community members, and school and media presentations. Chapman (2009, 4) goes further to argue that pupils ‘always bring prior knowledge to tasks that we set them, even if this knowledge is often tacit rather than explicit and even if...such prior knowledge frequently takes the form of misconceptions that we [teachers/educators] need to challenge’. The written curriculum is mediated and

filtered by the many individuals it passes through and between – so what is intended might well bear scant resemblance to what actually results.

A recent study by Harris and Reynolds (2014, 464) brought to the fore the issue of teaching and its perceived-versus-actual effects on students, an issue at the heart of this study: ‘Whereas history is seen by some as crucial in developing a sense of identity and fostering social cohesion, it is however, often based around narrowly nationalistic views of the past, and yet little is known about how students relate to the past they are taught’. Indeed, they go further to suggest that ‘little is known about the impact particular content taught in schools, and their associated narratives, have on young people and their understanding of themselves and the society within which they live’ (Harris & Reynolds, 2014, 467). It is hoped that this study will play some part in helping to address this deficit, and was one of the primary goals of the student questionnaires and focus group interviews that were used in gathering the data that is presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Grever, Haydn and Ribbens (2008, 78-9) note that, though commentators are divided as to whether school history should put more emphasis on the ‘transmission of the achievements and cultural heritage of the nation’ or ‘reflect more fully the presence and achievements of those from ethnic minority backgrounds,’ either approach must also take into consideration the preconceptions that students (perhaps with multiple identities) bring to the classroom. Again, the stress here is on mediation, filtering and external knowledge and how this complements and/or conflicts with the learning that takes place within the History classroom. As Bruner (2005, 29) observes, one of the features of hermeneutic compulsion ‘is the push to know “why” a story is told under “these” circumstances by “this” narrator’. History teaching involves the individual interpretations and constructions not only of a single historian and their text, but those of the teacher and the diversity of learners in a class as well. Not only are variations in student understanding predictable, they are often unrecognised. Television, film and music – not to mention families and friends – are but a few contributors to the cultural perceptions that students (and their educators) bring to the classroom. In the opinion of James (1999, 643), for example, modern British perceptions of the British Raj ‘depend more on literature and cinema than history’. With so many mediating influences in play, it is impossible to fully know how students come to understand British imperialism, but this study seeks not to come up with a holistic answer to this question, so much as to gauge the impact of classroom learning upon this process.

Although studying British imperial history is far from exclusively concerned with the ideas of ethnicity and “race,” covering many aspects of British imperialism would certainly raise issues along these lines, and for this very reason commentators like Cole (2004) and Penny (2010) see imperial history as important. Elton-Chalcraft (2009) notes that young people’s conceptions of “race” owe a great deal to perceptions gathered from the media – particularly television. This idea is taken even further by Rozas and Miller (2009, 25) who argue that students and teachers ‘bring a variety of social identities into a classroom, ranging from identities forged through frequent encounters with racism to those living in bubbles of unexamined white privilege,’ and that many harbour stereotypes that could either subconsciously or consciously lead to discomfort, or even confrontation, in the classroom. The teaching of empire might well raise such issues even more explicitly. Similar ideas are echoed in Epstein and Gist’s (2015, 57) study into US humanities teaching, which looked at teachers who ‘planned and implemented pedagogy to build upon and extend students’ understandings of race and racism, and to challenge students’ misconceptions’. The social and ethnic background of teachers and learners and the sort of media and social media that they are exposed to on a daily basis might well have a further (or even decisive) impact on how students perceive British imperialism. Such complexities, added to the more overt diversities and acknowledged biases of teachers and learners, serve to illustrate just how impossible it is for one to remain wholly neutral/balanced whilst teaching, despite one’s best efforts (if such an effort is made at all). Nevertheless, even when measures to ensure a ‘balanced perspective’ are taken, as a study by Chapman and Facey (2004, 38) contends, students might well draw quite tendentious conclusions on subjects like British imperialism, regardless.

Even when one accepts the prejudices, preconceptions and motivations (conscious or not) of policymakers, teachers and students, the complexity of mediation is still far from fully unwound. Willinsky (1998, 2-3) argues that five centuries of ‘studying, classifying, and ordering humanity within an imperial context gave rise to peculiar and powerful ideas of race, culture and nation that were, in effect, conceptual instruments that the West used to both divide up and educate the world’. He feels that despite the still recent fall of empire, its ‘educational project’ must remain, at least at an unconscious level, part of our educational systems (Willinsky, 1998, 4). So far as Willinsky is concerned, whether the History curriculum actively and overtly includes

imperial history content, British imperial history is present in schools and society nonetheless.

## **2.4 Identity**

Myers (2011, 793) argues that recent debates over the English History curriculum have reemphasised the continuing allure of the idea that one might create a cohesive identity for all students through a ‘national history’. This allure is especially strong for politicians and offers a chance at identity forming along specific ideological lines.

Another study that touches on this theme notes that given the identity-forming nature of grand narratives in History, it is important that such narratives be inclusive, both politically and socially (Ahonen, 2001). Ahonen (2001, 190) suggests that it is important for History curriculums to recognise ‘alternative narratives,’ and thus avoid, one might assume, some attempt at creating an *exclusive* identity. Critics of the recent reforms in the History curriculum in England have pointed to exclusive, nationalistic and ideologically-driven identity forming as part of the government’s motivations during the design of the new curriculum. Beck (2012, 8), as noted earlier, suggests that Gove’s British-centric “our island story” version of History sought to forge a ‘prospective neoconservative pedagogic identity’ among England’s children and future citizens. Clearly, the idea of History as important in identity-formation among English students is potentially both very divisive but also possibly something of a red herring when one considers whether such a definitive outcome is likely.

Gove’s approach to curriculum reform shares a number of ideas that were central to the New Right of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Phillips (1998, 129) notes that the great history debate of this earlier period was ‘not about the past but the present’ and that ‘its dynamism stemmed from tension between contrasting discourses on the nature, aims and purposes of history teaching, linked to correspondingly different conceptions of nationhood, culture and identity’. Much like the idea that we might begin to “celebrate” empire in schools today, New Right advocates suggested that a more traditional approach to history not only added a breadth to knowledge, but ‘even a sense of gratitude’ towards our imperial forbearers (Phillips, 1998, 34). The debate from 2010 onwards that is the focus here has raised many similar questions about how teaching British imperial history might alter student perceptions of their own identities.

Lopez, Carretero and Rodriguez-Moneo (2015, 253) argue that ‘the way a historical concept is interpreted certainly has a clear relation to the way people understand their own identity’. In their study of identity among students in Madrid, Spain, they found that nearly half of their participants displayed explicit identification with protagonists in the past, a sort of ‘atemporal national identity’. They suggest that although History is ‘always taught to produce an understanding of the relation between past and present’ such an approach could be misleading if students do not also understand that the past and present are ‘very different epistemological worlds’ (Lopez, Carretero & Rodriguez-Moneo, 2015, 274). This is echoed by Zadora (2015, 118) who argues that ‘Identification with a group necessarily implies adhesion to a past, present and future of a group, which allows us to affirm the importance of history, memory, and the historical narrative through which this adhesion is affected’.

Along such lines of thinking, it appears that the process of curriculum design could prove integral to the formation of (national) identity. However, as is discussed in Section 2.1 of the literature review, curriculum design (particularly of the “curriculum as syllabus” type), might give too much credence to the idea that selected content equals an understanding. If the curriculum, as it is argued here and elsewhere, is more of a process/praxis curriculum, then simply selecting content does not guarantee a particular understanding. Put another way, if students learn about the Clive of India and General Wolfe (two imperialist figures in the February 2013 draft curriculum, removed by July), this does not mean that they will inherently come to think of imperialism as these figures did. To believe as much would ask serious questions over the amount of focus on Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia at Key Stage 4 (prior to 2016 reforms), and what identity students would subsequently form. To study a subject in depth, interpreting and evaluating primary and secondary sources, with guidance from a well-informed teacher, students would hardly all come away from studying Nazism as hardened fascists. So why do people fear this is the likely outcome of teaching British imperialism? In her recent book, *History Education in the Formation of Social Identity*, Korostelina (2013) seeks to show how history education can be actively used to avoid attitudes of conflict and create a culture of peace. Firstly, she suggests that narratives that favour a majority group and denigrate a minority group must be challenged; second, that rather than stressing differences, diversity can be represented as a source of richness and strength; and thirdly, that it can be used to show how communities move away from destructive conflict towards shared prosperity and peace (Korostelina, 2013, 2-3). Indeed, any study

of British imperial history should avoid presenting imperialism as a one-dimensional story of “us” versus “them” – whoever us and they might be, and any such study should also present imperialism from a variety of sources and viewpoints.

Zajda (2015, 4) argues that a renewed sense of the importance of teaching national identity often results from period of identity crisis. For him, the 2005 London “7/7” bombings (and the ongoing perceived threat of fundamentalist terror) was the start of such a crisis, and saw the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, making clear the value of English/British national identity and its ‘values of liberty and tolerance and the principle of fairness to all’. This renewed focus on so-called “core British values” were reflected in Ajegebo Report of 2007 into citizenship education, which also recommended paying greater attention to the legacy of British imperialism (see especially: Osler, 2008). Though more than a decade on, recent UK government initiatives have echoed such projects, perhaps none so much as the integration (largely since 2014) into school curriculums of so-called Fundamental British Values (FBV), which have since become a ‘legal or quasi-legal requirement’ (Richardson, 2015, 37). Yet, as Richardson (2015, 37) rightly remarks, the idea of what constitutes a British identity (or an English one at that) have rarely been fixed or clear, but more of a ‘muddle and mixture’.

In a good overview of the complexity of what exactly – if anything – British identity is, among nine points, historian Robert Colls points specifically to Britain’s imperial past:

British national identity was not born of a deplorable past. It is true that British dominion was not built according to the principles of the Equal Opportunities Commission and we have to accept, too, that it was interwoven with imperialism and what we now call racism. In this it was not alone among other imperialisms – including republican and socialist imperialisms. At the same time we have to accept that British national identity survived because it was a broadly acceptable expression of the British people, to the British people, if not by the British people (Colls, 2012).

For Colls (2012), writing during the period of coalition government (2010-2015), the British had not stopped believing in themselves, but rather (since the 1950s) ‘over a very short period the conditions of that belief had evaporated. Between the Festival of Britain and the Millennium Dome, say, British national identity was no more’. Perhaps as Zajda (2015, 4) and Richardson (2015, 38) suggest, this was a reaction to internal existential threats from terrorism, or perhaps it was a partial reaction to stresses put on the very fabric of the United Kingdom, exacerbated by recent referendums on Scottish

independence (2014) or membership of the European Union (2016). Whatever the primary stress, it appears that it is the pressures upon unity that have provoked a national (and governmental) response in trying to establish a stronger sense of national identity. However this is to be achieved, it is argued here that to *exclude* British imperialism would prove an unacceptable whitewash, as the empire was very much a formative influence on whatever a British national identity is composed of in the twenty-first century.

Ideas of “race” and ethnicity – mentioned in Section 2.3 – also play a substantive role in the formation of student identity/identities. These ideas also play important roles in the history of British imperialism and post-WW2 British society. Over a decade ago, Cole and Stuart (2005), in their study of Asian and black trainee teachers working in South-east England, found that racism and xenophobia were widespread. Their conclusions suggested that the extent of racism was ‘deeply worrying,’ but also added that: ‘the teaching of imperialism, past and present, in schools...informs us most precisely about the historical and contemporary nature of British society’ (Cole & Stuart, 2005, 363). In one of Cole’s earlier essays, cited in the introduction here, he argues that an honest evaluation of imperialism needs to be reintroduced to British schools in order to at least make students aware of the implications and ramifications of racism (Cole, 2004, 534). Apple (2015, 308) building upon arguments of those such as Cole, suggests that education in general must ‘bear witness to negativity,’ by showing how educational policy and practice are ‘connected to the relations of exploitation and domination – and to struggles against such relations – in the larger society’. When one considers the role of British imperial history in identity forming, it could provide an essential contextualisation for the diverse student body of twenty-first century Britain.

In one recent examination of the teaching of diversity in the History classroom in England, the issue of empire arose as a key contemporary concern. The study argues that, in the early-twentieth century, History was used ‘to support a common national identity and empire’ but, as the nature of Britain and its relationship to empire have changed, attempts have been made, and are still being made, to adapt existing frameworks ‘to meet the needs of a multicultural society’ (Bracey, Gove-Humphries & Jackson, 2011, 174-175). From this stance, the teaching of Britain’s imperial history has an important, if complex, role to play. As Haydn, Arthur and Hunt (2001, 18) note, by the 1980s many schools in larger urban areas looked to use school history ‘to promote

appreciation of cultural diversity, celebrate cultural pluralism and combat racism’.

However, an important question remains as to whether teaching imperial history serves to lessen or exacerbate feelings of racial difference and/or prejudice?

Like a number of the theorists cited here, historian Bernard Porter (2004, 314-316) notes – critically – that many commentators see British attitudes to race as strongly connected to the empire and that these racial attitudes ‘are so often attributed to or connected in other ways with imperialism as to almost identify them together in some people’s minds’. Judd (1996, 5), similarly, feels that the ‘long-lasting experience of Empire affected the way in which Britain viewed both themselves and those whom they ruled’. He later notes that modern-day perceptions in Britain cannot escape their imperial past entirely: ‘Centuries of supremacy have left many British people ensnared in a mesh of prejudice and shallow assertiveness’ (Judd, 1996, 16). Theorist Bill Schwarz contends that ‘empire has much to tell us about race’ but also that ‘the determination to open up the story of empire to new voices – colonized as well as colonizers, black as well as white, women and children as well as men, queer as well as straight’ has met much continuing resistance (Schwarz, 2011, 17). Studying British imperial history clearly has potential to achieve a greater depth of understanding among members of society in the UK today, but with so many preconceptions and a seemingly close connection to the politically sensitive issues of race, ethnicity and religion, one can understand why the subject raises both strong sponsorship and criticism.

However, whether studying imperial history helps widen one’s understanding of modern Britain, forges broader understanding, or exacerbates differences in identities, is difficult to judge without further investigation. Research by Barton and McCully (2005) found that a balanced and standardised portrayal of history in Northern Ireland’s curriculum led not to a lessening of tension between Unionists and Nationalists, but rather had served to intensify students’ partisanship. Similarly, Chapman and Facey (2004, 38) found that presenting a ‘balanced perspective’ of British imperialism to their students still led students to view British imperial actions in an ‘overwhelmingly’ negative light, in contrast to many of the critics noted above who expect precisely the opposite outcome. These authors’ findings raise interesting questions for those who feel that, by selecting a certain type of subject matter, a certain way of thinking or type of identity is likely to be inculcated in students. Nevertheless, as Chapman and Facey (2004, 39-41) conclude, whatever the consequences, teachers should become more used to the idea that History teaching often raises questions of identity in a ‘fundamental



way'. If indeed the government of the day wished to create an ideologically-charged narrative of Britain's imperial history, there is little firm evidence that selecting facts and placing them on a "syllabus-style" curriculum would have anything like the desired outcome, and this study serves to give practice-based evidence of this.

## **2.5 Discussion**

As suggested from the outset, this thesis not only touches upon issues of contemporary political and media interest, but also addresses issues related to a broad array of educational literature and theory that pertain directly to classroom practitioners. In the review of literature above, a number of compelling areas of intersection are raised.

From exploring the literature surrounding the idea of a real versus an imagined curriculum, it becomes apparent that in recent years the UK government has stressed the knowledge that is to be learnt as the primary focus, fitting most closely with a vision that equates a curriculum to a syllabus. With this in mind, one might question whether such a vision is likely to become a reality just because a prescribed list of content is introduced – especially considering the many other understandings of a curriculum as experiential and ever-evolving. This thesis argues, and helps to show, that a curriculum is far more of a process than it is an all-powerful document that produces a preordained outcome.

Closely linked to the understanding of the curriculum is the issue of significance, and why imperial history deserves a place on a timetable already hampered by the nature of a topic (History) so vast as to make selection essential. Even if one accepts that certain amounts of imperial history should be covered, the issues of which topics, in what depth, and from whose viewpoint, still remain. This thesis cannot answer the latter part of this question, but it does show that even an in-depth study of a particular aspect of British imperial history produces a whole variety of interpretations and viewpoints, seemingly regardless of the specified content or the specific classroom experience.

Mediation appears to be a critical factor in the nature of how a curriculum is delivered and/or experienced, especially in a subject as politically and culturally charged as History. One might question whether reforming the curriculum with a "fact based" approach can ever guarantee or even guide the nature of the learning that takes place. One must also consider the diversities and acknowledged biases of teachers and

learners as well as the extra-curricular influences on their understanding. This study takes into account interviews with both students and teachers to try and gauge directly how they see this mediation taking place, as well as using these interviews (along with questionnaires) to indirectly assess the extent to which students' responses to source materials (pertaining to imperial history) differ and whether this is significant to any real extent.

Finally, the issue of identity – forming and developing – becomes yet another area that has a role to play in any exploration of teaching imperial history. Writings by both historians and educational theorists reveal an on-going discourse about the historical (and continuing) effects of empire on the British people that is far from resolved. Whether a renewed focus on imperial history helps to create a cohesive identity, greater understanding, or exacerbate feelings of difference is a debate that divides commentators and is yet to be answered. The place of British imperial history in the curriculum seems important to most of the commentators cited here, but the nature of how it is taught seems to raise a multitude of questions that will keep educational researchers busy for many years to come. This thesis shows that the majority of both teachers and students see studying British imperial history as important in modern Britain/England, even if this is for a variety of different reasons and reveals a multiplicity of different perceptions of the history itself.

### **3. APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

As outlined above, exploring the nature of how students learn about history – and specifically that of the British Empire – is inevitably a multifaceted task. The three key questions that arose from my initial review of the literature, and helped guide the nature of the research behind this thesis, were as follows:

1. Is it important for students in English schools to learn about British imperial history in school in the twenty-first century?
2. To what extent can/do History teachers mediate and thereby alter student perspectives of British imperial history?
3. Are students' views on British imperialism more a product of the classroom or of external, extra-curricular influences?

Although my research was guided by these questions, somewhat inevitably, as I began to analyse the data, the questions broadened and/or shifted, but always with a focus on ideas grounded in the core debates and the literature outlined in both Chapters 1 and 2, over the importance, place and relevance of imperial history in the twenty-first century classroom.

To start answering these questions, it was clear from the outset that the study needed a variety of data types. The extent to which students' perceptions of British imperialism are shaped in the classroom is virtually impossible to gauge with pinpoint accuracy. However, what did seem possible was to ascertain the extent to which one can see patterns within student responses, and postulate from there. In the context of the wider debates explored above, such patterns would inevitably prove telling of something. For example, if there was a direct correlation between student perceptions of imperialism and the curriculum content they had studied across different schools, then the assumptions of the "History Warriors" would seem to be proven correct regarding the significant role of curriculum content in forming student perceptions. If patterns varied from school to school, but not internally within each school (despite following similar curriculums), then the role of the teacher might be brought into question. Finally, if no commonalties were found within or across sites, then a key underlying premise of many "History Warriors" would be shaken, suggesting that neither content, nor teacher delivery of this content, was the primary determinant of how students developed their perceptions of the history of British imperialism after all.

### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

Before going on to outline the design of the various data collection methods that were ultimately adopted, it is important to address the bigger picture that informs this study. A recent study by Taylor and Medina (2013) defines research paradigms – from a philosophical perspective – as comprising an ontological view, an epistemological view, and a methodological approach. Waring (2012, 17) describes a paradigm as comprising of a person's conception of the world, its nature, and their position in it (along with their 'baggage') – similar sentiments suggesting that the term is an appropriate umbrella for the overall approach of a researcher. In this first section of the chapter, the reasoning behind the ontological, epistemological and methodological approaches adopted for this study are outlined.

#### **3.1.1 Ontological Approach**

To establish an ontological understanding as a researcher, one must, as Waring (2012) suggests, know how we view the nature or form of the social world. The primary ontological division regarding research methods is that between realism and constructivism. In the most basic terms, a realist interpretation accepts that there is a singular, objective reality, whereas a constructivist stands opposed to this realist assumption, believing instead that there are multiple realities constructed by multiple individuals. For Pring (2006, 51-56) however, such a division creates what he refers to as a 'false dualism' – and instead argues that although he accepts the needs for a hermeneutic, interpretative approach that falls towards constructivism, the realist approach allows us to accept some enduring features of reality that allow for distinctions to be made.

Whatever the complications of the constructivist paradigm, it is one that links closely to many of the assumptions at the heart of this research project and with my approach as a historian more generally. Just as when acting as a historian, I might attempt to recreate a narrative interpretation of past events, so, in my role as an educational researcher here, I seek to create an interpretation of the issues through the lenses of those involved in the study. Mediation, subjectivity and diversity of interpretation in regard to historical materials and understanding are central to my research project, and thus it would prove almost counterintuitive to not apply the same

belief in different constructions of reality to my ontological approach, if indeed one must reject one paradigm and accept the other.

### **3.1.2 Epistemological Approach**

When considering the epistemological approach taken in this research project, positivism and post-positivism seem to be aiming fundamentally for something that could never be achieved by this project: objective truths. Therefore, when deciding upon an appropriate epistemology, this project had to look elsewhere.

The main alternative epistemological approach to positivism outlined by most textbooks is interpretivism. This paradigm suggests – in close relation to a constructivist ontology – that direct or true knowledge is not possible (Waring, 2012). Indeed, an interpretive epistemology is ‘inter-subjective knowledge construction’ (Taylor & Medina, 2013). Lapan, Quartaroli and Riemer (2012, 8) argue that interpretive researchers assume that people ‘create their own meanings in interaction with the world around them’. Immediately, therefore, this epistemological approach melds very clearly with the core aims of this research project: to attempt to understand how others have come to understand and interpret the British Empire. Pring (2006, 48) notes, that such an approach accepts that the creation of findings comes about as a result of interactions between the researcher and that which is researched. This observation, however, highlights a core feature within interpretivism that could at once be its primary boon and its Achilles’ heel. On the positive side, interpretivism allows for a depth of understanding and even allows questions ‘to emerge and change as a situation becomes familiar’ (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012, 9). However, an interpretive researcher must also accept that their own actions and interactions with the research have an effect that it is at once substantial and difficult to measure.

Clearly there is a generally, if not entirely, accepted divide between the positivist and interpretivist epistemological approaches discussed above. Similarly, as this chapter goes on to consider this study’s research methods, there is another convenient and somewhat parallel dualism in approaches. In terms of research methods this divide generally matches positivism to quantitative methods and interpretivism to qualitative methods.

### 3.1.3 Implications of Research Design

In the most simplistic terms, one might group ontological—epistemological—research methods into two main strands:

1. Realist—Positivist—Quantitative
2. Constructivist—Interpretive—Qualitative

However, to echo Pring (2006) there is the danger of creating false dualisms. Therefore, although this project takes a constructivist ontological approach and an interpretive epistemological approach, it did not automatically follow that quantitative methods were thus entirely inappropriate. Nevertheless, with such a clear bias toward numerical and statistical data, the quantitative methods approach did not fit well with my research design, despite its multiple types of data collection (see Section 3.2). Although quantitative methods have clear attractions in terms of generalisability and (seeming) accuracy and objectivity, my research project is very much rooted in interpretation and differing understandings rather than hard facts and scientifically quantifiable findings.

Qualitative research has been subjected to a great deal of scrutiny, and a recent study by Harper and Kuh (2007) identifies a number of the perceived shortcomings of the qualitative approach and why – in their opinion – such criticisms are often unjustified. Just a selection of the ten “myths” regarding qualitative research that they identify – paraphrased here – are: lack of objectivity/reliability due to researcher “contamination”; subjective data lack accuracy; lack of generalisability; low participant numbers; and simply that it could be seen as an easy option. The authors feel that qualitative methods have often been regarded as a second-rate approach when compared with quantitative methods, which are often perceived as producing ‘generalizable and statistically significant findings’ (Harper & Kuh, 2007, 5). However, their article goes on to explode the so-called myths by laying out the shortcomings of some widely-held criticisms. They argue, among other things, that no methods of data collection can be entirely objective, that qualitative methods add depth to our understanding of results, that even a minority opinion should not be dismissed, and that the quality of qualitative data reflects the rigour and thoughtfulness of the researcher. This issue of data contamination via the researcher is dealt with by referring to the substantial literature on methods deployed to lessen this effect, including: member checks; participant-researcher reciprocity; peer debriefing; internal auditing; critical subjectivity, and

qualitative triangulation. Here, the most pressing of issues surrounding qualitative methods (if not exhaustively related here) are well summarised (Harper & Kuh, 2007).

There is now a substantial literature on mixed methods research, where both qualitative and quantitative methods are used to add the depth of some of the aspects of qualitative data to the benefits of quantitative methods (see Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Like multiple methods research, mixed methods result in better triangulation of data, allowing for cross-validation to provide for better generalisation (Hesse-Biber, 2010). In addition, mixed methods are more prone to developing and even initiating new directions for the research (Hesse-Biber, 2010).

Rather than making use of both qualitative and quantitative methods in the mould of a mixed methods approach, especially given this study's focus on interpretation and mediation, this research project will instead utilise *multiple* methods to add more utility and rigour to its qualitative approach. As Bell (2010) suggests, a multi-method approach to triangulation of data is generally preferable to using only one method of data collection. Indeed, as a study by Oliver-Hoyo and Allen (2006, 43) notes, triangulation serves to 'compare information to determine corroboration' and serves to minimise the errors of each method/system of data collection used.

## **3.2 Methodological Approach**

### **3.2.1 Case Studies**

Case studies are a common method for use by a single researcher undertaking a qualitative study such as this. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, 290) note, it is important in case studies 'for events and situations to be allowed to speak for themselves, rather than to be largely interpreted, evaluated or judged by the researcher'. Again, it is critical that as the researcher I remained as neutral as possible in both the data collection and analysis processes.

In addition to using triangulation to increase the reliability and generalisability of data, this study also took place at three different types of educational institution, in what Ashley (2012) refers to as a multiple case study (see Section 3.2.2). Multiple site (or multisite) studies are used to 'address the same research question in a number of settings using similar data collection and analysis procedures in each setting' (Herriott & Firestone, 1983, 14). As Herriott and Firestone (1983, 14) go on to note, the aim is to permit 'cross-site comparison without necessarily sacrificing within-site understanding.'

allowing a researcher to harness both the depth of a case study and some of the breadth of a larger scale project. This benefit is crucial in understanding the wider implications of the eventual findings of this research project.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, 293) cite a very useful set of strengths and weaknesses of case studies drawn up in a 1984 work by Nisbet and Watt. Strengths include: the ability to catch unique features; they can be undertaken by a single researcher; and they can embrace unanticipated results. These three particular strengths are all critical to the nature of my study. On the other hand, there are undeniable shortcomings to case studies that can be lessened by triangulation and using multiple sites, but not erased. These shortcomings include the fact that case studies are: not easily generalisable; not easily open to cross-checking; and they are prone to observer bias. All of these weaknesses were taken into account when gathering, analysing and evaluating data and, although this does not mean they ceased to exist, constant reflection on such issues did help to avoid any conscious irregularities. Given the amount of data that my study created, it was also important to bear in mind the inter-related issues of depth and breadth in my choice of three different centres and variable numbers of students participating at each centre (Burgess, Sieminski & Arthur, 2006, 59).

### **3.2.2 Sampling**

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, 143) outline five key factors that one must take into account when deciding upon the samples that are to be used in this sort of study: the size of the sample; the representativeness and parameters of the sample; access to the sample; sampling strategy; and the kind of research involved. Given that a qualitative approach to research has already been outlined, it is useful here to summarise how the other four factors were addressed.

This study used purposive sampling, as I had already decided upon the use of different types of education provider to give a suitable breadth of responses. The providers ultimately selected comprised of the following “types”:

- State school sixth form (state-run institution forming part of a secondary school)
- Independent school sixth form (independent institution forming part of a secondary school)
- Sixth form college (state-run institution not connected with a secondary school)



These multiple, heterogeneous sites (selected primarily on the basis of the *type* of education provider) were selected to address the issue of the representativeness of the data gathered – though of course the generalisability of the results is still limited by the scale of the research undertaken. In many respects the selection of these sites was dictated primarily by case study selection rather than sampling strategy, but nevertheless the aim was still to produce more generalisable and reliable findings (Newby, 2010, 255).

The reason I chose to focus on Sixth Form teaching (KS5), rather than on Key Stages 1-4, is closely related to the issue of how empire is taught in schools at the present time. As noted in Chapter 2, only at KS3 is there a mandatory guideline that suggests that the British Empire must be covered, and this is open to a huge degree of interpretation by schools and teachers. At AS/A Level there were clearly identifiable courses on the British Empire, which required the body of knowledge that was taught to be broadly similar to enable AS/A Level students to pass their exams. However, there was a vast array of choice available in AS/A Level module options, and therefore finding sites that opted to teach the imperial history modules was a severe limiting factor in terms of their potential inclusion in this study.

Among my chosen AS/A Level providers, the sample sizes in this study were also limited by the size of the class/classes taking the AS/A Level course. Access to the samples was also a limiting factor in a number of ways and led, to some extent, to access being dictated by convenience or opportunistic sampling (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, 156-158). Given that I was in full-time employment as a school teacher and school terms tend to roughly coincide – it was very important to plan visits carefully with regard to not only my availability but also the availability of the students and teachers, and when they had their relevant lessons (Bell, 2010). In addition, it was important to identify my three research sites as early as possible as there was the potential that a number of educational providers might not want to take part in research of this nature. In the end, however, all of the education providers I approached agreed to take part in the project.

All three sites were located within the boundaries of a large town in the south of England (renamed here as “Coria”). The aim of keeping the sites within a small geographic area was to try and keep as many variables as possible out of the equation. For the sake of anonymity, all of the sites were given pseudonyms (and alphanumeric

abbreviations in the findings sections), and all of the students and staff who took part in the data collection have been designated corresponding anonymous alphanumeric descriptors.

With such a degree of focus on taught content in Chapters 1 and 2, it is important that one is able to take into account the “curriculum” followed at A Level in the three sites. Until September 2015, all Edexcel A Level History courses were subdivided into Year 12 (AS Level) and Year 13 (A2 Level), with Year 12 taking three content-driven modules, and Year 13 taking one content-driven module and one research-driven coursework module (an AS and an A2 combined to form an A Level).<sup>12</sup> As can be seen, Sites 2 and 3 followed the exact same three modules at AS, and Site 1 also studied the same module for half of the AS (India). For clarity, the Unit 1 options listed for Year 12 are each worth 25% of the AS mark, and the Unit 2 option is worth 50%. Teachers interviewed at Sites 1 and 2 also noted that they felt their Y13 coursework (CW) option bore an important relationship to British imperialism, albeit not quite so directly as the Year 12 modules (listed in italics below):

**Site 1: Coria FE College:** A further education college offering a wide range of courses, including History via the following modules (Edexcel):

Year 12 (S1G1):

Unit 1, D2: Mao’s China, 1949-76

Unit 1, D7: Politics, Presidency and Society in the USA, 1968-2001

Unit 2, D2: Britain and the Nationalist Challenge in India, 1900-47

Year 13 (S1G2):

Unit 3, D1: From Kaiser to Führer: Germany, 1900-45

Unit 4, CW43: The Middle East and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, c1900-2001

**Site 2: Coria Comprehensive:** A state secondary school offering a wide range of courses, including History via the following modules (Edexcel):

Year 12 (S2G1):

Unit 1, C6: Britain and the Scramble for Africa, c1875-1914

Unit 1, C7: Retreat from Empire: Decolonisation in Africa, c1957-81

Unit 2, D2: Britain and the Nationalist Challenge in India, 1900-47

Year 13 (S2G2):

Unit 3, E2 A World Divided: Superpower Relations, 1944-90

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<sup>12</sup> Edexcel is one of the three main A Level exam boards in England (the others being OCR and AQA). From September 2015 A Level History was revised to become a non-modular (linear) course, and AS Levels now no longer form half of the A Level course, but are instead stand-alone courses. Thus, the AS courses followed by all students in this study now no longer exist in the same form.

Unit 4, CW43: The Middle East and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, c1900-2001

**Site 3: Coria Independent School:** An independent, selective school offering a wide range of courses, including History via the following modules (Edexcel):

Year 12 (S3G1):

Unit 1, C6: Britain and the Scramble for Africa, c1875-1914

Unit 1, C7: Retreat from Empire: Decolonisation in Africa, c1957-81

Unit 2, D2: Britain and the Nationalist Challenge in India, 1900-47

Year 13 (S3G2):

Unit 3, B1: France, 1786-1830: Revolution, Empire and Restoration

Unit 4, CW38: The Making of Modern Russia, 1856-1964

At all of these sites, the Year 13 students that took part in the study had studied the AS previously.<sup>13</sup> At the first two sites it was possible to gather data from both Y12 and Y13 on the same day, as that is when lessons happened to be timetabled. In Site 3, this was not possible and so data was collected on two days over consecutive weeks. In each site, data was collected from one group of Y12 students and one group of Y13 students studying History. At every site the Y13 groups had studied the same material as the Y12 students (in the previous calendar year). The Y13 groups were smaller than the Year 12 groups due to the almost inevitable attrition in numbers between AS and A2. The numbers varied more in some sites than others as outlined here – gender has also been recorded:

Site 1: *Coria FE College (22 students)*

Year 12: 17 students (14 female, 3 male) A-Q

Year 13: 5 students (5 female) R-V

Site 2: *Coria Comprehensive (23 students)*

Year 12: 14 students (7 female, 7 male) A-N

Year 13: 9 students (3 female, 6 male) O-W

Site 3: *Coria Independent School (15 students)*

Year 12: 9 students (2 female, 7 male) A-I

Year 13: 6 students (3 female, 3 male) J-O

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<sup>13</sup> There was one student in S1G2 who had not studied the same AS options as the other students at his/her centre, but he/she only very partially completed the questionnaire and did not speak or interact during the focus group interview. On reflection, it was decided that this student's questionnaire contributions were best excluded from the study entirely, as they were likely to prove too anomalous for a study that was based on common core subject knowledge. As a result, S1G2 is listed as comprising of the 5 students whose contributions are used here.

### *Overall*

Year 12: 40 students (23 female, 17 male)

Year 13: 20 students (11 female, 9 male)

Total students: 60 (34 female, 26 male)

Though the numbers above show the gender breakdown of the groups involved, they do not outline other characteristics of the groups, such as ethnicity, and this is primarily down to the importance of maintaining anonymity for the students involved. To give, for example, a breakdown of students by ethnicity would in some cases enable certain students' comments within the questionnaire responses to be identified by their peers, who were also involved in the study. For ethical reasons, therefore, such information was not requested or recorded.

### **3.3 Design of Research Methods**

In this section, I have outlined my three methods of data collection and, where relevant, any changes that were made from the pilot study carried out at a different site to the three explored here (for more details see Burns, 2015). The process of data analysis for each type of data collected is then explored in a separate section that follows.

#### **3.3.1 Student Questionnaire**

The main reason for choosing a questionnaire for collecting data was that – although it is a method more often seen as most suitable for collecting positivist data (Scott & Morrison, 2006) – it had a number of distinct advantages. As Scott (1996, 61) notes, questionnaires do not have to be positivist, but are necessarily located along three continua (factual/opinion, open/closed and structured/unstructured), allowing them to be far more qualitative if so designed. As Opie (2004) notes, questionnaires offer many benefits, including: standardised questions, anonymity, and that questions can be written for specific purposes. However, as Scott and Morrison (2006) caution, it is often said that questionnaires are better for establishing correlations between variables than *causes*. For this reason it was necessary to make the questionnaire as rich and qualitative as possible through the use of open-ended questions.

Between the pilot stage of my questionnaire (at a fourth site, with one Year 12 and one Year 13 group) and the finalised version, there were a couple of changes made to

help consistency and clarity, and the first of these related directly to the questions. The first change was to make the wording of the questions identical for each source: “What does this source tell us about the nature of the British Empire?” rather than subtle variations on this theme used in the pilot. The use of a short “open-ended” question enabled students to express themselves freely (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Opie, 2004), while avoiding the dangers of asking leading or biased questions (among the many other pitfalls outlined by Wellington (2015, 195)). The second change from the pilot was to provide the students with the title, date of production, and author/artist of the sources clearly alongside each source. The main reason for this change was to ensure the questions and images were less likely to be overly misinterpreted.

The questionnaires were self-administered in class time in the students’ regular classroom, allowing for easy distribution, explanation of purpose, identification and correction of misunderstanding, and more control over completion (Opie, 2004, 105). The regular classroom teacher was also present, which I judged (on the basis of the pilot results) would bring an air of familiarity and ease to proceedings. Students completed the questionnaires individually after I had given a short introduction to my research project and an explanation of the consent form that formed the first two pages of the questionnaire (see Appendix 3). At this stage it was made clear to the students that no real names would be used in the presentation of this data at any stage of the writing up process (Thomas, 2009). In this way, the research exercise aimed to be as unobtrusive as possible and seem more like part of a routine day in school/college.<sup>14</sup> The students were advised to take around five minutes per response and I marked the time to them with an announcement after each five-minute period had passed, with the aim of preventing students writing either too briefly or spending all of their time on one response. The reason for limiting time to twenty minutes was also partially due to the amount of time different sites were able to allow me to collect data with the students.

The questionnaire contained four historical sources, two pictorial and two textual. The two images provided were purposely chosen to contrast with the textual sources – both chronologically and thematically – and were also selected to be unknown to the students and veer away from the content they were studying directly for their A Level course. The textual sources were also selected to differ from the content studied at A Level, but – in addition – to be more well-known historical sources, to contrast with the

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<sup>14</sup> In the case of Site 3 I was known to some of the students completing the questionnaire but had never been their History teacher.

pictures. The decision to use both pictorial and textual sources aimed to draw upon different (taught) skills the students might bring to bear, and also to see whether one or the other stimulated richer responses.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of the existing literature on the subject of using visual sources in the social sciences, the most apt source of discussion comes from research conducted into photo-elicitation interviews rather than questionnaires. However, many of the motivations for using visual images to stimulate responses in questionnaires align very closely to those theorised by research into their use in interviews. Harper (2002, 13) argues that images ‘evoke deeper elements of human consciousness that [sic] do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain’s capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words’. Furthermore, in their exploration of student responses to fine art, Freedman and Wood (1999, 129) posit that ‘students probably develop a great deal of knowledge about imagery through their intergraphical experiences,’ a process that is didactic as it involves ‘meanings that are learned and taught by social groups’. The authors go on to suggest that it is also possible that what students learn ‘may depend more on association than analysis as a result of the types of images they most often encounter’ – perhaps treating a fine art image with tools learned when decoding advertisements rather than interpreting the image in an extended manner (Freedman & Wood, 1999, 129). Thus, one might argue that the analysis of images provokes both deeper responses that, in turn, bring in a range of meanings that have been learned in a variety of different arenas. The aim of the questionnaires was not only to begin to reveal student perceptions of British imperialism, but (perhaps more so) to address the issue of consistency of responses across and within sites and begin to question ideas raised in the literature review as regards the power of curriculum designers and the influence of teachers as a mediating influence on student perceptions.

### **3.3.2 Student Focus Group Interviews**

Focus group interviews offer structure and flexibility that encourage group interaction on topics of specific interest, and allow a researcher to capture multiple points of view (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996). This is perhaps the key difference between focus

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<sup>15</sup> Very early findings for this section were discussed far more broadly in a short think-piece (Burns, 2016a). The more detailed analysis of Source 1, explored in the data analysis section here, was the subject of a longer academic article (Burns, 2016b).

group interviews and my other forms of data collection: the group dynamic allows one to glean collective ideas and the tensions within them. As Parker and Tritter (2006, 26) advise, my focus groups were aimed at ‘generating in-depth discussion via a logical sequence of open-ended questions that encourages universal participation within the group’.

The group dynamic, of course, offers as many problems as it does benefits, examples of which are discussed by Robson (2002). Where one might feel that a group atmosphere is likely to stimulate and broaden the thinking and participation of some, it can also lead others to close up for fear of embarrassment, conflict or power. As Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook (2007) note, one must take into account both individual characteristics and the differing factors affecting interactions between them. The authors suggest that these interpersonal factors are key to determining the outcomes of a focus group interview, influencing: group cohesiveness, compatibility, and homogeneity/heterogeneity, which in turn affect group conformity, leadership emergence, bases and uses of power, and interpersonal conflict. The authors also note the importance of the congeniality of the environment where the focus group interview is conducted (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007). Thomas (2009, 169) adds that the group dynamic has the potential to encourage individuals to behave differently than they might alone, particularly that they might be encouraged into riskier comments due to ‘safety in numbers’. This factor is an inevitable risk factor in measuring the true perceptions of a focus group, but I feel that the benefits of the group dynamic outweigh this issue.

I recorded the focus group conversations on a digital recorder (rather than a cassette tape as in the pilot study) and then transcribed the discussion on a word processor and coded it in line with both questionnaire themes and my research questions. Though time-consuming, this allowed me to reflect upon the issues raised and also allowed me to better assess and analyse the data.

In the pilot focus group, although I was not the teacher of the set involved, I was known to the students and accept that this might have affected their responses. This was also the case for students in Site 3 of the main study. In the pilot study, the set’s teacher requested to observe the group interview, with the assurance that they would not intervene in the discussion. I was initially unsure about this, but after consideration felt that actually this might add an additional layer of ease to the group, which could be important in schools where I was unfamiliar. I also felt that the teacher’s observation of

the group might prove beneficial during the interview as, rather than needing to relate student responses to the teacher, they would already have heard everything. However, I concede that there might well be drawbacks to this, perhaps causing the students to be less open in their responses, and causing the teacher to perhaps be more defensive in their own interviews. After weighing up the pros and cons, I decided to ask the teacher to remain for all six interviews in the main study. Each focus group interview in the main study was conducted immediately after the students completed their questionnaire.

When designing the questions for the focus group, I wanted to invite both discussion about issues raised in the questionnaires and also to bring responses closer to the key questions of my project. With some repetitions or probes, I used the same questions as used in the pilot study to provoke responses. The total time projected for the interview was around twenty to twenty-five minutes, and at this point I would draw the interview to a close. Again, the times were chosen to allow for adequate responses, but also to fit with the amount of time available across the sites. In S1G1 and S2G1 the interview naturally ran at about twenty minutes, and there was the need for more reiteration of the question (or prompts, which are noted in the findings section) due to longer periods of silence during the interview. However, in S3G1, there were no gaps at all, and the students' discussion ran to around thirty minutes, the consequence of this being that they – almost inevitably – raised more issues/factors than the first two groups.

Unlike in my pilot study, in the three main sites the students were still in possession of their completed questionnaires, and therefore there was no need to redistribute the source material contained in the questionnaire. However, the pictures were still displayed via a projector onto a whiteboard whilst they were under consideration. The focus groups were optional, but encouraged by the sets' teachers, and all students remained, although some chose not to actively contribute.

Using the sources as prompts for the initial questions (attached here as Appendix 4), I used the following questions to stimulate group responses:

#### **Source 1**

1. Do you think this picture is a good example of what the British Empire was like?
2. Do you think that it tells us anything about the role of race in the British Empire?

#### **Source 2**

3. Do you think this picture is a good example of what the British Empire was like?



4. Do you think *this* source tells us anything about the role of race in the British Empire?

### **Sources 3 and 4**

5. Which of these do you think gives us the best example of what the British Empire was like in reality?

### **Non-source focused questions**

6. Do you think that it is important for us to learn about Britain's imperial history, and (if so, or if not) why?
7. Do you think that studying British imperial history is relevant?
8. Does it tell us anything about Britain today? (Prompts: British society, British foreign policy)?
9. Other than in History lessons in school, do you think you have got an impression of the British Empire from anywhere else?

I was pleased with the initial results of the focus group interviews as the responses were closer to more of the key questions at the heart of my study than the responses in the questionnaires, and the group dynamic did allow students to draw from each other's ideas and in turn raise more interesting observations. Although the first five questions in the interviews aimed to allow comparison with the data gathered in the questionnaires, the final four questions aimed to address more directly ideas of how important students saw the study of the British Empire as being, and whether they felt they gained ideas about the empire from outside of the classroom.

### **3.3.3 Teacher Interviews**

Even though there are inevitably some commonalities between focus group interviews and one-on-one interviews, they are by no means the same and therefore when designing the teacher interview I consulted a range of literature to see how best to undertake this aspect of my pilot data collection. I had carried out some small-scale one-on-one interviews in the past, which involved interviewing university lecturers to gather their thoughts on the issue of feedback at Higher Education (HE) level (Burns, 2013). This experience certainly gave me some ideas as to how the interview process might work for my pilot study here. The HE feedback study presented me with a great deal of rich qualitative data to analyse and I felt that the perceptions of the interviewees gathered in that study really did help me to address the wider questions that had been raised in my literature review. Therefore, I was able to work from a position of,

admittedly limited, experience in the interview process when designing the interview on this occasion.

Rabionet (2011) outlines a six-stage journey to the interviewing process, which I found very useful as a guide to planning my own interview process:

1. Selecting the kind of interview
2. Establishing the ethical guidelines
3. Crafting the interview protocol
4. Conducting and recording the interview
5. Analysing and summarising the data
6. Reporting the findings

In line with the focus group interview with students, I selected a semi-structured interview rather than a fully structured or unstructured approach. A fully structured approach seemed far too restrictive for gathering data that seeks to find opinions and individual perspectives that are often best discovered in an occasionally tangential and meandering conversation. Nevertheless, there was a clear agenda and a set of clear research questions that needed to be addressed and an unstructured approach left too much room for diversion and omission on these key points. As Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999) put it: the semi-structured interview allows for flexibility, directionality and agenda – combined – thus making it the best fit for my study’s core goals. My aim was to conduct an interview lasting no more than half an hour, where my areas of interest were already chosen and identified; the questions would be open-ended, allowing for modification of format and wording in relation to the interviewee’s responses (Ary *et al.*, 2010). Cousin (2009, 71) sees the semi-structured interview as providing ‘rich empirical data about the lives and perspectives of individuals’ and this really gets to the heart of what the teacher interview section of my data collection sought to achieve. I was not attempting to find “correct answers” to questions, but the perspective of an individual who has some control over the process of disseminating information and stimulating discussion about British imperial history on a day-to-day basis. However, I was not seeking to ask questions that addressed personal aspects of the interviewee’s own life directly (except as this might come to light inadvertently), as might be the case in a more ethnographical study.

It is important to also note that, despite the benefits of the semi-structured interview – that might appear a convenient “halfway house” between the fully structured and unstructured models – I did not select it as a compromise or a so-called “easy option”. As Wengraf (2001, 5) notes: it is a mistake to assume that semi-

structured interviews are “easier” as, in reality, they need to be ‘*fully* planned and prepared’. He also suggests that the semi-structured interview requires more discipline and creativity in the session and more time for analysis and interpretation afterwards.

As well as being complex to design, semi-structured interviews also have a number of drawbacks that a fully structured interview might better avoid. Mitchell and Jolley (2010), writing from the point-of-view of researchers in psychology, outline just some of the potential pitfalls surrounding the semi-structured interview. According to these researchers, a major drawback of the semi-structured interview is that data follow-up questions are difficult to interpret because different participants are asked different questions, and one cannot compare responses to follow-ups if only one person was asked the follow-up question. They also argue that even responses to the main interview questions are difficult to interpret because these questions might not be asked in the same standardised way, giving the interviewer more freedom to introduce bias into the data: by deciding which answers to probe and which not, the interviewer is potentially affecting what the participants say. In this study the interviewees were given a list of guiding questions when they signed their consent forms, though after this they rarely consulted it (Appendix 5).

Cousin (2009, 73) also sees some issues with ambiguity in questions and answers, as well as with interpretation. Cousin advises that one should approach the interview not as a “search and discover mission,” but as ‘an interactional event in which meaning-making is *in situ* and the product of both players in the interview rather than that of the skilful transcript analyst after the event,’ a kind of “third space” where interviewer and interviewee ‘work together to develop understandings’. This in itself suggests that the role of the interviewer is *active* and cannot (and perhaps should not) realistically be inactive. Holstein and Gubrium (1997, 114) similarly argue that interviews are not ‘neutral conduits’ but are almost unavoidably collaborative, and that one should therefore seek to acknowledge these constructions within the interview. However, one must concede that in interviews – and, in the words of these authors, especially within “active” interviews – data contamination is omnipresent. Although this last sentiment might sound a little unsatisfactory for a social science research project, I would argue that as long as one acknowledges that any data gathered is – to an extent – affected by the interviewer and interview process, it is still a rich source of data that would be hard to gather in any other way. As Scott and Usher (1999) suggest, a face-to-face oral interview might well be the best way for many people to express

themselves, as well as giving the interviewer the best opportunity to frame and reframe questions to make sure their meaning is fully understood.

Rabionet (2010) concedes that the two stages of crafting her own interview protocol (introducing oneself as the interviewer and selecting questions) were the aspects of her study that she found most difficult. In this section, I have outlined the major issues raised in the literature on designing interviews and how I decided to tackle them when it came to my own interviews. I always planned to conduct my interviews face-to-face because, as Thomas (2009, 160) notes, people will usually be ‘energised to help you by your physical presence’ and, more importantly, ‘you will be able to relate to interviewees while you are talking to them...and use gesture or words to encourage them to say more (or less).’

### ***3.3.3.1 Setting***

As Thomas (2009) points out, it is good to put the interviewee at ease as this increases the likelihood of gathering rich data. From the start, I should therefore note that my interviewee at Site 3 was somebody who already knew me in my capacity as a History teacher and therefore there was less need to establish a rapport with general conversation as was the case in other sites. The interviews were all conducted at a time chosen by the interviewee in their own classroom, in an attempt to create a setting that would maximise their feeling of being at ease. I was dressed smartly in work-style attire, and asked the interviewees if they would mind reading through the consent form and outline questions (Appendix 5), and signing their consent – making my “agenda” fully explicit. My aim throughout the interviews was to make clear that although this was a formal interview for a research context, it was one that was conducted between peers, as fellow teachers, to avoid there being any perceived “power imbalance” (Cousin, 2009, 75).

I suggested beforehand that I envisaged the interview lasting somewhere between 20 and 30 minutes in total, firstly to allow the interviewees an idea of the reasonable depth of response I was seeking to elicit, allowing me to ensure that I got through my questions without inconveniencing the interviewee, and that different interviews were not substantially disproportionate in length.

### 3.3.3.2 Questions

When designing questions for the interview, I selected six different questions closely linked either with my three key research questions, or to the issues raised by students in the pilot study:

1. Do you feel that it important for students in English schools to learn about British imperial history at school in the twenty-first century, and why?
2. By the time students study History at A Level, do you think students have already formed clear opinions of British imperialism?
3. Other than at school, how do you think students form views on the history of the British Empire?
4. Do History teachers have an obligation to provide a ‘balanced’ view of British imperialism, and how might this be achieved?
5. Is it possible during a student’s school career – from Key Stage 1 through to post-16 (A Level) education – to gain a real understanding of the British Empire, given that it forms only a fraction of the curriculum?
6. Do you feel that a better knowledge and understanding of British imperialism has a generally positive or negative effect on how students view the United Kingdom today?

The questions were designed to be what Hatch (2002) refers to as *guiding questions*, much like the ‘shopping list of topics’ suggested by Robson (2002). In line with Thomas (2009), I regarded my questions as part of an “interview schedule” – flexible enough for questions not to need repeating if the matter had already been covered, and equally open to probing and follow up questions.

I managed to address each of these guiding questions in the roughly 25 minutes that each interview took, though I also used a number of follow up questions and prompts when I felt the answers were either too brief to be useful or veering slightly from the intended focus. I concede this is an issue as regards consistency between interviews, but I feel that it is justifiable. As Scott and Usher (1999, 110) note, in a face-to-face interview the interviewer also ‘offers a number of clues as to how the interviewee should respond’ such as, physical cues, vocal intonation, and sarcasm, to name but a few. These cues are difficult to avoid while maintaining a congenial rapport with the interviewee, and again I believe that their presence should be acknowledged.

I chose, in a similar manner to my focus group interview, to record the interviews on a voice-recording device. As Scott and Usher (1999) note, the voice recorder can be intrusive and affects privacy and may ‘breach the public-private dimension of the exchange as it is understood by the person being interviewed,’ but I made every effort to make it clear that I intended this information to be made public, with the proviso that this would be done without using the interviewee’s real identity. Although note taking might have been less intrusive, it also would not entirely have avoided the issue of intrusion, and would have been more prone to human error than a recording device.

### **3.4 Data Analysis Methodology**

Once I had collected the handwritten questionnaires and recorded the focus group and teacher interviews, I transcribed all the data into Microsoft Word, to allow for easier searching and coding. A key benefit and – at the same time – a primary difficulty of posing open-ended questions – such as those used in all three types of data collected here – is that they generally engender rich and lengthy answers. This means not only that the questions are more difficult for the respondent to answer, but also that they are very challenging to analyse (Opie, 2004; Wellington, 2015). Burgess, Sieminski and Arthur (2006) suggest that coding such texts allows for easier cross-referencing, which certainly proved to be the case here. The purpose of this coding, as Moghaddam (2006) outlines, was ‘to recognise, develop and relate the concepts that are the building blocks of theory’.

For the questionnaires, a series of codes was devised using a form of qualitative content analysis as outlined by Schreier (2014) (see Appendix 6). The categories were formed in an ‘*a posteriori*’ (or inductive) manner from themes that arose during analysis of the pilot study questionnaire data and were then further refined iteratively so that each broad code became mutually exclusive (Wellington, 2015, 271; Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). The transcribed questionnaires were then coded using the eight coding categories by highlighting the text. To allow for highlighting to be distinct, only four colours were used, which is the reason for there being two sets of coding for each transcript (see Appendix 7). The data was then rechecked several times once all the transcriptions had been coded once, to ensure the codes had been applied uniformly across all transcripts. The coded data was then analysed for subthemes, the most

significant of which were grouped and then the data was organised against the subthemes as well (see text boxes in Appendix 7). The subthemes were emergent and were specific to the source, rather being applied uniformly across all sources. When subthemes occurred in the data presented here, they are indicated by subheadings in the appropriate sections of Chapter 4. As well as being explored in detail in Chapters 4 and 5, the coded data is also presented in both tabular and graphical forms within Chapter 4 for heuristic rather than statistical purposes, to allow for consideration of the raw and unfiltered results within the discussion of the analysis that follows.

Though the inductive form of the coding outlined above was used for all three types of data collection, there was also logic to coding the first five questions (that relate to the sources used in the questionnaires) from the focus group data using the themes that emerged from the questionnaires (Appendix 6), so that both data types could be more directly compared and contrasted. However, as well as using the questionnaire coding themes, new codes were also created and refined, which were not directly related to the eight questionnaire themes. For Questions 6 through 9 in the focus group data (which are not related to the sources), I organised the student responses into different thematic codes that arose across the six groups. Due to the relatively small amount of data, it was easy to highlight themes across the groups with marginal notes to highlight content, and then link these together into a thematically organised analysis. The thematic codes that were developed and then checked and re-checked upon the transcripts again are shown here as the subheadings under each question (though questions 7 and 8 are dealt with collectively, in Chapter 4, as a result).

Analysing the data from the three teacher interviews proved troublesome as the themes that emerged from the secondary literature (mediation, identity, significance and curriculum) were not mutually exclusive enough to form cohesive categories and also made it difficult to incorporate emergent themes, most notably “balance”. Once again, a form of qualitative content analysis outlined by Schreier (2014, 170), allowed for the reduction of data, in a manner that was both systematic and flexible. This flexibility allowed categories to be both concept driven and data driven, meaning key emergent themes did not need to be excluded as a result of a more strictly thematic/theoretical approach. As with the other types of data, the subheadings used in the presentation of the data here reflect the broad themes which arose and were later analysed further.

### **3.5 Research Trustworthiness**

The questionnaires and the first section of the focus group questions sought to gauge the extent to which common perceptions of British imperialism could be identified within groups and sites, and/or across groups and sites (the effect). The expectation was that the responses would be broadly heterogeneous within groups and sites, as well as across them. The second half of the focus group questions and the teacher interviews, meanwhile, sought to query why students might come to differing views on British imperialism (the cause) and why the study of this subject might be important (the context). These ideas, which emerged from the literature review, were the guiding ones behind the internal validity of this study.

The variables which it was possible to control in this study were somewhat limited, but all of the students included in the results used here studied at least one AS Level History module in common (Britain and the Nationalist Challenge in India, 1900-47). Given that close adherence to the content prescribed by the examination board needed to be maintained across all three sites to ensure students were able to complete their exams successfully, this allowed for a good deal of uniformity on one level. Other control variables that were taken into consideration were geography (the sites were all situated in and around the same town) and teachers, at each site the same teacher had taught both groups their imperial history module(s). The questionnaires, focus group interviews and teacher interviews all followed the designs outlined above to allow, as far as reasonably possible, for a consistent exercise to be carried out in each case at each site. For internal validity to be satisfied, these controls allowed for a reasonable expectation that the study would gauge what it intended to – in terms of context, cause and effect – and the way in which the data is presented in Chapter 4 allow readers to judge that the presentation of the data is fair and accurate (Palaologou, Needham & Male, 2016, 31; Conrad & Serlin, 2006, 412).

As Chandra and Sharma (2004) point out, it is difficult to meet every criteria for both internal and external validity, though in education the strength of the validity tends towards the former rather than the latter. However, as Perry and Nichols (2015, 93) rightly argue, internal and external validity are ‘not mutually exclusive,’ but at the very least the former is required for the latter to exist at all. The fact that the study was carried out with a number of groups across a variety of types of site, with three different



types of data gathered at each site, does increase the trustworthiness of the findings even if the overall size of the sample was small. Though the data presented was subject to my personal subjectivity, measures were in place to avoid any conscious bias, and the data is presented verbatim at length below for any readers to scrutinise themselves. If another researcher were to undertake the study, the results might look superficially different, but I have little doubt that the findings would be the same.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

The main priority, when it came to collecting data during this study, was to assure that participants felt confident they knew what their participation meant, that they were aware information about their identities would be kept anonymous, and that they were aware that consent could be withdrawn in the future. All of these factors were clearly stated in the questionnaire (and its attached consent form), which was completed before the student focus group interviews, and were restated immediately before the interviews. On the questionnaire, participants were also asked to tick boxes agreeing to several different things separately so as not to make them feel that it was an “all or nothing” (Smythe & Murray, 2005, 186) consent form (see Appendix 3). In the focus groups, students were made aware that they did not need to contribute if they were not comfortable in doing so. In the teacher interviews the participants were told about the anonymity that would be maintained and that they only needed to answer questions as far as they were comfortable to do so, as well as being asked to sign a consent form.

In terms of other ethical considerations, I felt that the questions and images used in the questionnaires and focus groups were appropriate and non-offensive to the 16-18 year-old age group involved. All respondents were aged sixteen or over, and the regular classroom teacher was present during the data collection period (both the filling out of the questionnaires and the focus group interviews). Kvale (2007, 26) provides a useful checklist of questions regarding the ethics of interviewing that led me to conclude that the interviews offered few ethical conundrums so long as the identity of the interviewees were withheld in any written output. All references to the participants' names were contained only on the consent forms, which were detached from the data and stored safely (only connected to the original consent forms by the assigned alphanumeric codes used here). The tapes/digital recordings of the focus group interviews and teacher interviews were transcribed without identifying students or

teachers by name (or, in the students' case, by alphanumeric designation) and the recordings were safely stored. Therefore, my questionnaires, focus group interviews and teacher interviews adhered to all of the conditions expected of informed consent: competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; BERA Ethical Guidelines, 2011).

Though the research topic is not of a particularly personal, intrusive or intimate nature, I did feel that some issues might be raised over ethnicity/nationality or politics, but no concerns arose in the course of the student or teacher interviews. As a teacher and researcher I was fully aware of my responsibility to be culturally aware and sensitive in order to gain the best results in my interviews and focus groups (Shah 2004).

#### **4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

This chapter considers student and teacher responses to the three different data collection methods and what these tell us about the diversity of student perceptions of empire and how students get many of their ideas about empire from beyond the classroom. Although the analysis that follows in Chapter 5 links this more closely to the literature review (Chapter 2), this chapter does highlight the key themes being explored in the data.

The data presented in this chapter is dealt with in three sections to echo the three different types of data collection. The first, and longest, section being the student questionnaire data. This information is related in more detail than the interview data for two reasons: firstly, on a practical level there was far more data produced, and secondly, more than the other two types of data, the questionnaires provide clear evidence that student responses to unfamiliar sources on British imperialism seem to bear little – if any – relation to the content they have covered at A Level or the way in which they were taught. In short, the questionnaire data shows – in detail – that student responses were widely heterogeneous, despite the individual groups having studied the same material on British imperialism (and with the same teacher within sites).

The interview data from both the student focus groups and the individual class teachers follows the questionnaire data here. The focus group data also serves two purposes, to both confirm the heterogeneity of student perceptions within groups when it came to source evaluation, but also to elucidate more clearly – in the students' opinions – why it is important to learn about British imperialism and what the main external factors were in influencing their perceptions of it. The teacher interviews consist of the smallest data pool, but one of the richest for speaking directly to key issues underscoring this thesis. The interviews provide an insight into how teachers see British imperialism as playing a central role in history education as well as glean insights into where they see students gaining their diverse views on British imperialism, despite similarities in the content they cover at A Level.

In the first section of this chapter, individual students are identified by their alphanumeric descriptor, so S2A would be a student in Year 12 at Site 2 (or S2G1) (see Chapter 3 for a full breakdown). In the second section (focus groups interviews), the students are identified simply by their group, and in the final section, the teachers are given pseudonyms. As noted above, although some suggestions are given as to what the

data is being used to display in this chapter, the overall analysis of the findings can be found in Chapter 5. Finally, where the questionnaire data regarding each source is limited to in-depth discussion of two themes per source, due to the huge amount of data and lack of space here, this is expanded to four themes in the focus groups section to avoid too much repetition and to reveal a greater sense of the diversity that could not be delved into here with the questionnaires.

#### **4.1 Questionnaire – Source 1 “Negro Dance”**

The key finding throughout the following data is that the student responses are remarkably heterogeneous, within individual groups and across all three sites. What becomes evident is that even when the tabular data would suggest broad homogeneity in terms of the proportion of students mentioning a theme in their written responses, the detailed analysis reveals this to be misleading (see especially: Section 4.5). Instead, the detailed breakdown of student responses within each theme far more often shows heterogeneous responses within and across groups and sites. This finding is important in showing not only the diversity of perceptions of British imperial rule that students identified, but also in providing compelling evidence to suggest that a common core knowledge of British imperialism (curriculum as syllabus), especially within groups, does not lead to a common perception of imperialism more generally.



Source 1: Bridgens, 1836

© The British Library Board, 789.g.13 Plate 22

In the questionnaire, Source 1 was provided with only the title of the image, “Negro Dance”, the date of production (1836), and the name of the artist, Richard Bridgens (see Appendix 3).<sup>16</sup> Further information was not provided to the students in order to ensure they were using their own interpretative skills and their own knowledge about British imperialism.<sup>17</sup>

The same eight thematic codes were used to analyse all four sources (see Appendix 6 for a detailed breakdown of the terms included within each theme). In the table below, the groups are listed in the top line followed by the number of students in that group in brackets. Below this, the number of students whose responses matched up to the coding for each of the eight key terms is shown. So, for example, there was only a single student out of the nine in Group 1 at Site 3 (S3G1) whose response triggered the coding for “Pride” in their response to Source 1.

*Table 1: Occurrences of Thematic Coding in Responses to Source 1*

Source 1	S1 G1 (17)	S1 G2 (5)	S2 G1 (14)	S2 G2 (9)	S3 G1 (9)	S3 G2 (6)	Total (60)
<b>Pride</b>	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Inequality</b>	7	2	7	2	4	2	24
<b>Unity</b>	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Christian Civ</b>	1	0	2	1	0	1	5
<b>Happiness</b>	14	4	8	7	5	3	41
<b>Oppression</b>	4	1	7	2	1	0	15
<b>Power</b>	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Race</b>	12	5	12	8	8	5	50

Student responses to Source 1 saw very few mentions of the themes “Pride” (1), “Unity” (1), “Power” (1) and “Christian Civilisation” (5), as one would expect given that this image was unlikely to yield a great many responses in these thematic areas. “Oppression” saw a relatively low yield of responses (15), with “Inequality” somewhat ahead (24), but – as expected – the two themes that appeared far more frequently in the student responses were “Race” (50) and “Happiness” (41). The fact that “Race” was raised most frequently is unsurprising, nor is the frequency of references to

<sup>16</sup> Analysis of this image has been published in a very similar form as Burns (2016b).

<sup>17</sup> The image was taken from a collection entitled *West India Scenery*, and the date of publication lies three years after the abolition of slavery in most parts of the British Empire (1833). The British Library describes the image as an ‘...illustration of enslaved men and women dancing... Singing, dancing and playing musical instruments were important ways for the slaves to express their cultural traditions and demonstrate that these traditions had survived the forced move to the Caribbean - although there would have been few opportunities for relaxation and entertainment’ (Bridgens, 1836).

“Happiness”. As noted in the data analysis methodology above, however, there was a great deal of diversity within the responses to each code. Thus, where responses used similar terms but connoted a very different “reading” of the source (for example if a student saw the “Happiness” being portrayed as either false or genuine), the student responses have been subdivided in the section below. Below, each of the two most commonly mentioned themes are explored in depth to exemplify the extent of the heterogeneity of student responses.

#### **4.1.1 Race**

“Race”, along with “Happiness”, was perhaps the most predictable thing for students to mention in response to Source 1 – particularly given the title “Negro Dance”. Many pondered why the painting was produced: whether it aimed to record a culture or to perpetuate racial stereotypes. Others felt that the most notable aspect of the image was the separation of races (by choice or through segregation). What is most remarkable is the level of diversity in responses, especially within each site. Mentions of race were so frequent that the heterogeneity of the responses is best seen through the three subcategories used below (positive cultural difference, negative cultural difference and separation) that emerged from the data itself. It should be noted from the outset that a number of students weighed up positive and negative views and their comments might appear below in both sections.

##### ***4.1.1.1 Observation of Cultural Difference (Positive)***

A minority strand of opinion saw the portrayal of the “Negro Dance” as an act of observation (of an anthropological/scientific nature) that appears largely positive. This was not apparent in Site 1, nor in S2G1. However in S2G2 students envisaged variously: a ‘seemingly traditional’ cultural dance (S2P), that the artist was attempting to study ‘Africans’ on behalf of the British Empire (S2Q), and that the ‘British [were] capturing images of the natives of less economically developed countries and how life was like in 1836 for the indigenus [sic] people, their customs’ a[nd] fashion/mannerisms [sic]’ (S2T).

In S3G1, some students saw Source 1 as a ‘depiction of the tribal people’ performing (or being made to perform) for the British (S3B), or an ‘indigenous culture’ being observed (S3G). S3D felt the picture eschewed the negative racism common at the

time, but rather ‘shows passion of African culture’. In S3G2, only S3L saw in this image a ‘curiosity and desire to observe and learn from other cultures’ in what was a ‘dynamic occurrence simply observed by the artist present’.

#### ***4.1.1.2 Observation of Cultural Difference (Negative)***

By far the more numerous set of responses gave a negative reading of the source when it came to racial/cultural difference. In Site 1, S1B suggests that the title of the image did not need to contain the word “Negro” and that the picture attempted ‘to illustrate that ‘negro’ people are bad as they all seem to be in strange positions in the photo’. A focus on the implicit racism in the title was something shared by others in the group such as S1L, and S1F who considered the word ‘a racist term used by the British to refer to the Africans’. S1P saw the starkest racial stereotyping: ‘the British empire saw people who were not of English nationality as less civilised and more of a species than a race’. In Year 13, S1R found the source ‘closed minded and judgemental’ with the dancers portrayed as ‘poor, primitive and even grotesque,’ even if, she noted, it did show some British interest in their subjects.

In S2G1 many saw negative stereotyping and imagery in Source 1, seeing the figures being purposefully depicted as barbaric: ‘uncivilised and chaotic’ (S2A), ‘disorderly’ (S2K), or ‘mucking around and dancing barefoot – not working’ (S2B). Others felt similarly, suggesting the figures had been made to ‘look ‘weird’, or ‘different’ or less human or ‘normal’ than a normal human’ (S2C) or ‘strange and of a lesser civilisation [sic]’ (S2J). In Year 13, S2R saw the image as an attempt to ‘stereotype’ rather than record, a motive echoed by S2S who described the era as one of ‘deep rooted racism’.

Finally, in S3G1, some students saw the figures depicted like animals: ‘almost like that of a wildlife scene, like hippos at the watering hole, or a pride of lions, the native of the source makes the natives seem sub-human’ (S3A) or ‘not humans but another animal’ (S3I). S3C saw the picture more straightforwardly as symbolic of the ‘racial objectification’ common in the period. In S3G2, S3J suggested the figures were portrayed as ‘wild’ and ‘chaotic’ with one man ‘brandishing what appears to be a pitchfork,’ demonstrating the level of ‘ridicule/myth applied to black people’. S3N claims that the title and image suggest ‘a stereotypical view that the British held about any other culture than their own’. Here, some of the students appear to have taken the

image and impressed an even more negative tone upon it than the image really merits – the chaos and pitchfork wielding perhaps more in the eye of the beholder than actually present in the image.

#### ***4.1.1.3 Racial Separation***

As a sub-theme, this divided the sites, with very few in Sites 2 and 3 identifying racial separation or segregation. At S1G1, however, a good number mentioned racial separation: '[Source 1] does not show any dancing or interactions between two groups British & African, leading to the thought that the two groups did not get along or enjoy each others interactions' (S1E), 'there don't seem to be any white people around,' (S1J) (an observation echoed by S1K), 'black people were seperated [sic] from the other races... the white and blacks hadn't mixed' (S1M), and 'It tells us that the British Empire that they wanted to keep black persons away from white people' (S1Q). However, only one student in S1G2 broached this theme, feeling the picture showed 'different races are joining together and celebrating each other away from the western english though dance [sic]' (S1V).

In Site 2, a couple of Year 12 students (S2E and S2N) noted that the picture showed that black and white people lived separately, and one Year 13 (S2O) mentioned that the lack of white people in the picture implied the black people are happier without white 'masters' around. In Site 3 none of the Year 13 students noted racial separation, but two Year 12s did. S3C saw in the image and its title the 'division of race at the time'. S3G identified 'some assimilation' but noted that the title suggested a still-present separateness. Finally, there was one student who saw quite the opposite in the picture – through what must be a misreading of the source - with S3E apparently seeing 'white men dancing with black natives'.

#### **4.1.2 Happiness**

The second most frequent theme raised in response to Source 1, was "Happiness", itself a tricky term when it came to this image. The picture seems to depict people dancing and generally having a good time, whatever the realities of the situation or motivations of the artist, it is not surprising at all that most of the students noted the happiness of the individuals in the picture. However, for the sake of drawing comparisons, the student



responses are divided here between those who critiqued the happiness on display, and those who seemed to consider the image's portrayal of happiness at face value.

#### ***4.1.2.1 Happiness (Uncritical Responses)***

Across all three sites, there were those who discussed Source 1 almost as a “face value” discussion, without critiquing the source or questioning its reliability. For these students, the image was either one of simply happiness and celebration, or evidence that the British were benevolent rulers.

In Site 1, S1H went so far as to suggest that her negative opinion of empire was challenged by the image:

In this source we can learn how people lived happily in the British Empire dancing cheerfully and playing music, coming together as a community. There appears to be no form of repression or sadness within this village, which differs from my previous thoughts upon the empire, a place I thought was doomed to failure.

S1N echoed this view, and S1O argued that the source showed how the British had ‘respect... for the culture of their subjects and that perhaps British rule is not oppressive as viewed by others’. S1C felt that the image showed the empire ‘in a positive light... it was good and liked,’ while S1L felt that overall the appearance of the people having fun in the picture did *not* show that the ‘empire had an oppressive regime’. In Year 13, there were also those who saw a positive, happy image. S1S felt that the people in the image seemed to be ‘enjoying and dancing according to their culture’ suggesting that the empire was ‘impressive and less oppressive [sic]’. S1U even argued that the willingness of the figures to dance in front of the British showed ‘a good open relationship’ and ‘no sign of fear... which suggests the British Empire wasn’t so oppressive’.

In Site 2, there were fewer uncritical mentions of “happiness” among the Year 12 respondents than in Site 1. S2L was one of the most overtly non-critical:

The picture potrays [sic] the Empire as beautiful to everyone. The black people in the source look happy and are enjoying their livelihood. As all the black people in the source have good quality clothes and shelter of good quality it shows that they have a good quality of life and as this is within the Empire, the recieved [sic] all the luxuries due to the Empire ruling them. Therefore portrays the Empire as beneficial and considerate towards everyone.

S2I also made some relatively non-critical observations, saying that the arrival of empire did not completely ‘change the normal way of life and culture for the people that lived there’. Finally, S2K simply noted that the people in the picture were ‘having fun’.

In Site 3 the proportion of students who mentioned “happiness” in either a critical or an uncritical way was the lowest among the three sites. None of the Year 12 students gave a plainly non-critical response, but a few of the Year 13s did. S3M noted that the people were ‘happy with their living standards’ and seemed ‘quite happy and healthy,’ though it could be argued “seem” is rather a hedging term. S3O uses the hedging term “suggest” but does not overtly critique the source’s portrayal of happiness:

This suggests the British Empire affected peoples [sic] lives in a positive way bringing positivity, wealth and happiness into peoples [sic] lives that were within the British Empire. Therefore the source suggests that the nature if the British Empire was helping people and providing them with a happy better life than before.

Site 3 saw the fewest non-critical observations of the “happiness” shown in Source 1 – a statistic not clear in the table above, but much clearer upon deeper analysis of the results.

#### ***4.1.2.2 Happiness (Critical Views)***

Where S1G1 might well have provided the majority of the number of uncritical responses across the groups, it also produced a good number of critical responses. S1J noted a happiness that might be the ‘supposed slaves’ trying to simply ‘lift their spirits,’ while S1B identified people ‘generally looking like they’re having a good time being free,’ while cautioning that they might be slaves and the aim of the artist might well be to mark out racial difference. S1G suggested that ‘as the picture was by someone British they may of [sic] depicted it as better than it was as they wanted the people to believe the British empire was a nice place to live’. She continued upon this theme, suggesting that ‘This is his [the artist’s] interpretation of the Empire. He could of [sic] easily staged this and, furthermore, this is only a small group of people next to the magnitude of people controlled by India’. Here the students more clearly evaluated the image, either suspicious of authorship (the artist) or seeing a mismatch with their own knowledge.

Another theme that arose among students in S1G1 was that the pictured figures were happy because the British were not around. S1M made the clearest observation along these lines:

This suggests that the black people were separated [sic] from the other races, and that they celebrated their own things just with their type of people. It shows that people still had fun and would carry on with their traditions even with the British in charge.

S1E suggested that the people seem ‘very joyous and happy’ but that there seems to be no interaction between races implying ‘that the two groups did not get along or enjoy each others interactions’ – an idea that is very frequently discussed in the race section above and echoed by S1K. In S1G2, S1V also noted that although those depicted seem happy, this was only when ‘there are no british around’.

In general, the students in S2G1 were more critical of the portrayal of happiness in Source 1 than S1G1, for example: ‘everyone looks happy and care free – the British Empire took this away from them’ (S2B), ‘as a means of propaganda, implying that these people are going through hardship but somebody wants to think they are happy’ (S2D), and ‘a propaganda tool’ to make one think that ‘the blacks are having fun’ (S2F). Similarly, S2H saw potential bias in the artist’s motivations, while S2N suggested, among other things, that the figures might be happy because the British ‘have left’. All of these themes echo the critical responses across Site 1: propaganda, the contrast between the image and students’ own knowledge, and the idea that happiness comes when the British are not around.

Students in S2G2 were also far more critical than not. S2S suggested that the ‘happy and joyful’ people have to be put into the context of slavery, racism and stereotyping existing in the empire. S2U noted that the source showed that ‘the British Empire did not enforce ‘western culture’ on their colonised countries,’ but that one must be suspicious of the likely ‘British artist,’ while S2W saw the image as not ‘reflective of the British Empire’ in general. S2O thought that although the picture showed ‘black people dancing and looking very happy/positive’ this is possibly as a result that the white people are not around ‘suggesting that they’re happier without their ‘masters’ or British people in charge of them’.

S3G1 saw the most clearly critical responses of all to the theme of “happiness”. In Year 12, S3B suggested that one could read into the source that the seemingly happy people are actually subjugated and performing for ‘British amusement’. S3C also noted a ‘happy outlook on empire making the populations... seem jovial as if brought about by the empire itself,’ but that in reality it ‘serves more to demonstrate British opinions of their own rule’. Similarly, S3E felt the image did not represent the entirety of the

imperial reality and S3F suggested the image might have been made to ‘portray the Empire in a good light’. However, S3F then goes on to note that it is also possible the people really were happy, as after the abolition of slavery ‘many Africans were happy to have British rulers’. In S3G2, S3N was the most overt critic of the happiness on show in the image, concluding simply: ‘The presence of food & musical instruments suggests that the British Empire was a time of happiness & abundance of goods, which was not the case’.

Overall, perhaps the most interesting thing revealed in the critical responses is the diversity of type of criticisms within the groups of students. Although similar criticisms arise across groups, they are often only noted individually by one or two people in each group.

#### 4.1.3 Overview

As shown above, although there are some differences between groups and sites in terms of student responses based only on the key codes, when one digs deeper into the subcategories listed above, even more differences within groups become clear. In the graphs below, the students who mentioned the key words within the coding categories are shown by group in Graph 1, and those who fell into one of the subcategories (“Happiness”) are shown in Graph 2.<sup>18</sup> Although these graphs merely echo the diversity of the comments outlined above, they can also help one see more clearly through the preponderance of quotations to the key point: that the student answers diverge both within and between groups and sites.

What the first graph below illustrates, beyond simply the frequency with which each theme was mentioned, is the level of diversity in student responses on a broad-brush scale. However, although on one level this is useful, in many cases the difference does not appear to be that substantial. Graph 2 goes beyond simply the frequency with which key theme coding was triggered, and instead considers the manner in which it was discussed (either uncritically or critically).<sup>19</sup> It is in this way that the diversity

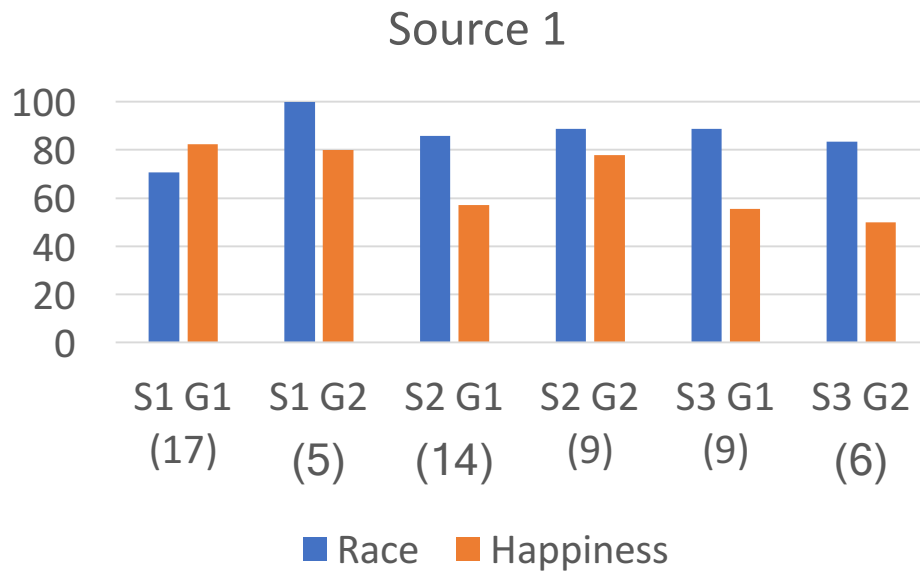
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<sup>18</sup> The reason for not opting to show “Race” in a graphical form is largely due to overlaps between subcategories and students who made neutral mentions of the coding terms, rather than engaging with the terms in the ways in which the subcategories have been outlined above (i.e. in a positive or negative manner), and thus the resulting graph was not particularly helpful.

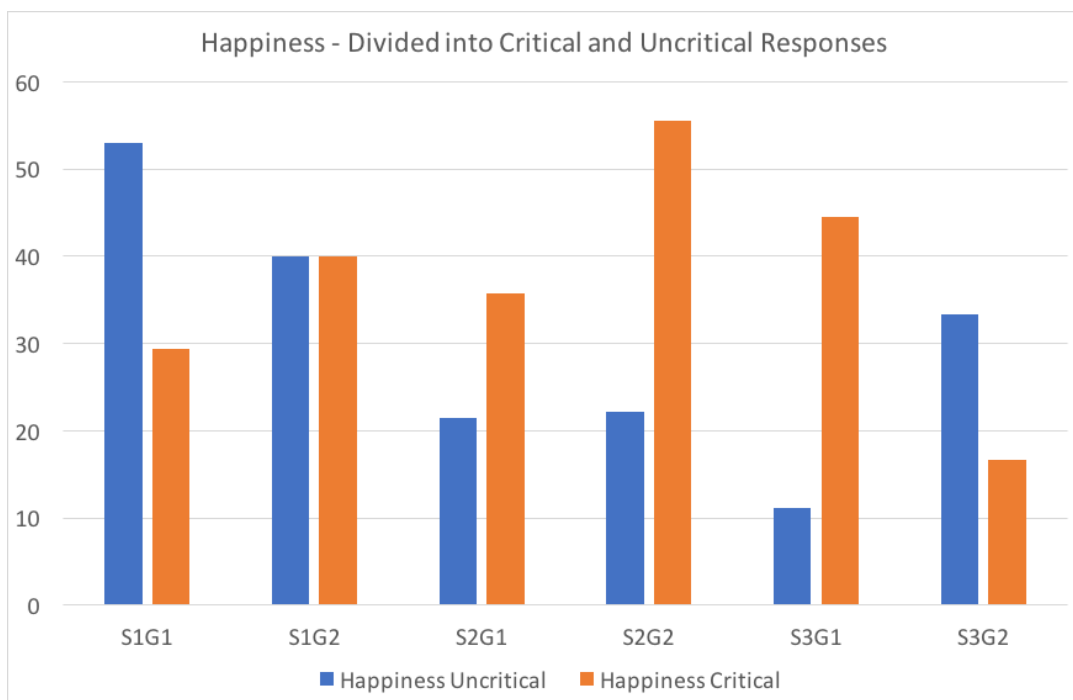
<sup>19</sup> Students were subcategorised as critical (generally with a negative slant) or uncritical (taken at face value or with a positive slant) based on the general nature of their comments. A small number of students made relatively neutral comments that still triggered the coding and therefore, though not quoted above (4.1.2) as clear/plain examples, they are included in Graph 2 for completeness as “uncritical” by default.

between and within groups is displayed far more clearly. When one subdivides the themes along the nature of the response one can see the diversity not only between groups but *within* them, as is clear in Graph 2, and assessed in more detail in the text above (see Section 4.1.2). What this suggests is that students are drawing upon different ideas and concepts to draw wider conclusions about the nature of British imperialism.

*Graph 1: Total % Response Across Groups to Source 1 (Top Two Themes)*



*Graph 2: Total % Response Across Groups to Source 1 (Happiness)*



## 4.2 Questionnaire – Source 2 “Finest Hour”

The second source in the student questionnaire was an excerpt from the new Prime Minister, Winston Churchill’s, famous “finest hour” speech given in the wake of the German victory over France on 18 June 1940 during World War Two (see Appendix 3). This was the first of the two textual sources provided to the students and the most recent chronologically. Both non-pictorial sources were selected to be more recognisable to students, but also something they were unlikely to have encountered directly in their AS/A Level studies.

*Table 2: Occurrences of Thematic Coding in Responses to Source 2*

Source 2	S1 G1 (17)	S1 G2 (5)	S2 G1 (14)	S2 G2 (9)	S3 G1 (9)	S3 G2 (6)	Total (60)
<b>Pride</b>	4	1	3	5	3	2	18
<b>Inequality</b>	2	0	3	1	1	1	8
<b>Unity</b>	6	1	4	3	1	1	16
<b>Christian Civ</b>	3	0	8	3	2	3	19
<b>Happiness</b>	0	0	0	2	2	0	4
<b>Oppression</b>	1	0	1	0	1	0	3
<b>Power</b>	10	4	8	4	3	2	31
<b>Race</b>	1	0	0	0	2	0	3

As Table 2 shows, there was some diversity between the sites and groups within the sites, when it came to the key terms that arose in the coding. In line with the other sources, in order to best exemplify the heterogeneity of the student responses within and across groups, this section will focus only upon the two most frequently mentioned themes: “Power” (31) and “Christian Civilisation” (19).

### 4.2.1 Power

In relation to Source 2, more students mentioned words relating to the theme of “Power” than any other, but this was unsurprising considering that the source talks about the Second World War. For this reason, simple use of the word “war/warfare” – unless clearly linked to the nature of the empire – was not included in the coding system

in this theme.<sup>20</sup> What is apparent below is that only a minority voice across the different groups critiqued the depiction of “Power” in the image.

In Site 1, across both groups, more than half of the students used terms related to this category, more than in either Site 2 or Site 3. In S1G1, S1A stated simply that winning the war would make the empire ‘look powerful,’ while others built upon this, suggesting the Prime Minister needed to show Britain was willing to show its strength and maintain its image as, variously: ‘grand’ (S1B), ‘[of] amazing stature’ (S1E), ‘so powerful’ (S1J), and ‘the most powerful throughout the world’ (S1Q). S1G noted that, as the empire was one united country, it was their duty to fight, as did S1M and S1O. S1P pointed out more practically that the ‘British clearly still felt quite powerful if they believed they had a chance of fighting off the Germans’. However, S1C was more critical, noting: ‘this can highlight a violent nature of the empire which wouldn’t of [sic] been liked by some people’. In Year 13, some students argued similarly that the source shows the British: ‘wanted to preserve it and thought they had a high level of authority and most importantly, a duty to preserve imperialism all over the world’ (S1S), or ‘very strong and dutiful through his persuasive speech... giving a positive, heroic image to the British Empire’ (S1U). On the more critical side, S1T stated: ‘Here Churchill is talking of the strength of the empire against their enemy, which is ironic because at this point Britain had lost or was losing most of its empire,’ with S1V going further to argue Churchill ‘is starting to doubt Britain and considering possible outcome of Germany defeating everyone therefore you can infer the British empire is not as strong as it claims to be’.

At Site 2 again there were a good many responses related to “strength”. In S2G1 most of the responses reiterated the idea of strength the source portrays: ‘Presents British Empire as powerful’ (S2A), ‘implies the British Empire is the strongest power in the world’ (S2D), ‘there was a sense of strength as part of the British Empire’ (S2I), ‘suggests the Empire as being the strongest force on Earth’ (S2L), and ‘the British empire could be seen as being powerful and reliable’ (S2N). However, some went further than this, such as S2B, who said that the British Empire presented itself as ‘head of the world,’ even though this might irk power rivals such as the USA. A couple of students also critiqued the image of power in Churchill’s speech, with S2E saying that although the empire “seemed” powerful, ‘The British Empire are powerful due to

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<sup>20</sup> This was only the case for Source 2, as noted in Appendix 6.

having control of India but that isn't mentioned because of their pride for their country only, highlighting their unfair nature towards India'. S2J similarly suggests that the speech was mainly focused on how the empire would help Great Britain itself: 'The Empire was a stronge founding however for only the benifit of the British [sic]'. In Year 13, the idea of power among rivals raised in Year 12 by S2B was present again in the comments of S2U who felt the source stressed the way the 'British valued how they were perceived in the world, especially among other strong, western powers' and S2V saw its 'global power and wealth... being threatened by that of the "United States" and Hitler's army.' S2R was strongly critical, arguing that the source 'shows the arrogance and pride the British have in the strength of their empire... In [Churchill's] eyes, everyone relies on Britain'.

Finally, in Site 3, one can see quite a diversity of opinion on this source, with some very critical views of Churchill. Though S3F suggested the source showed 'Britain was a major power in the Second World War,' others were less convinced. S3C posited that Churchill might have presented the empire as 'an eternal omnipotent power that is the light of the world' but 'this was not necessarily the view held by the majority of the British populace'. S3D goes further, arguing Churchill 'firmely [sic] believed that the Empire was the finest piece of political and military act ever... Yet... it was forged in blood, misunderstanding [sic] and backstabbing like all empires... The phrase "the sun never sets and the blood never dries on the british empire" is one with great truth behind it'. In Year 13 the comments were somewhat less critical, with more paraphrasing of the source's sentiments: 'suggests that Britain is more powerful than the US... Churchill's speech gives a premise of an idea of power, patriotism and everlasting to the nature of British Empire' (S3M) and 'it is the British Empire that has the power to win the war... Also this source mentions the commonwealth and how it shall still help to fight suggesting Britian [sic] has good relations still with them suggesting Britain handled decolonisation very well' (S3O). Here, the Year 13s seemed to deal with the source less critically than their Year 12 peers.

#### **4.2.2 Christian Civilisation**

As the theme "Christian Civilisation" is mentioned in Churchill's speech, it was to be expected that a number of students would raise it. Some merely reiterated the author's sentiments, while others proved more critical. However, more surprisingly, it was only



in S2G1 that more than half of the students mentioned the theme, where in all other groups only a relatively small minority did so.

In Site 1, Year 13 made no mention at all of “Christian civilisation” but there were some mentions in Year 12. S1H rather intriguingly stated that the source shows: ‘how the people of Britain stick together in order to survive, using factors such as religion to coat over Britains deamons [sic] and protect its people from the sinister events of the outside world’. S1N differs here suggesting that the empire was unable to ‘civilise itself due to conflict within the empire’ and S1K simply notes that Churchill uses the phrase as ‘this was the most popular religion in Britain at this time’. Here, S1H and S1N showed two quite different views of using Christianity to “civilise”.

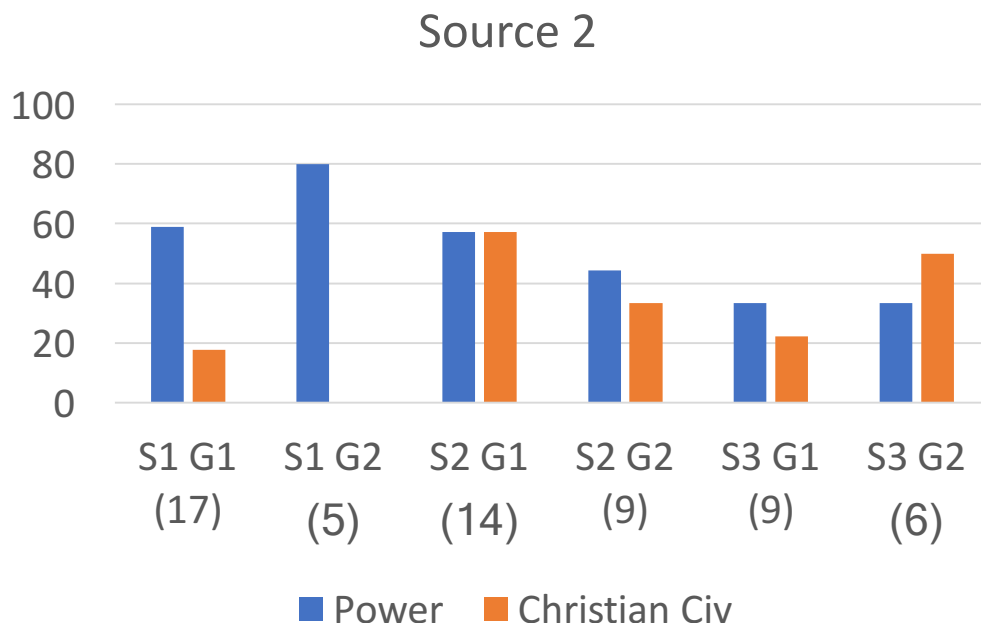
At Site 2, there were a good deal more mentions of the key term. S2B saw the term as sounding ‘quite superior – Britain as better than other nations,’ others saw the term as showing the empire itself was seen as ‘a Christian civilisation’ (S2D) and upheld ‘Christian values’ (S2H), whereas C2C saw the term as a way of rallying Christians in Britain itself and S2K as being indicative of the ‘overwhelming amount of the population [that] are christian [sic]’. However, more critical voices also appeared, with S2F suggesting the use of the phrase was a lie, given that both Nazi Germany and the British Empire were Christian. Though, like so many other responses to this source, there was little mention of the fact a good deal of the empire was not Christian (especially the Raj). However, S2J did note this incongruity, seeing Churchill ‘ignoring all other religions’ and S2M agreed, seeing this lack of recognition as ‘very unfair’. In Year 13, some saw Churchill as portraying Britain as the ‘last country to be considered Christian’ (S2O) or ‘a forerunner to society and more modern and more moral ideas’ (S2T), while S2P thought it showed Churchill’s belief that Christian civilisation was the ‘best type of civilisation...[and] the importance that religion held in Britain in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, which is definitely not present now’.

In Site 3, both groups made some mention of the key terms. S3B used the term “we” to refer to the empire, adding that the source makes it seem as though, ‘as a “Christian Civilization,” we have a duty to civilise everywhere’. S3G however, echoed the concerns of S2J and S2M: ‘Not only were there a great number of non-Christians in Britain’s colonies (e.g. inhabitants/Muslims and Hindus) of India. But also he ignores the Christians of other parts of the world (South America, Africa). Churchill is of course trying to raise morale but this speech illuminates his very pro White Anglican Christian stance and how “they” are those that must lead the free against Hitler’. In Year 13, S3K

linked the phrase to earlier imperialism: “‘Christian civilisation’ → spreading of ‘one true religion’ → missionaries → mission of Empire to Civilise,’ while S3L noted that it was used by Churchill to give the empire a ‘higher purpose’. S3J reflected the comments of S3G in Year 12, suggesting the phrase was ‘demonstrative of the religious zeal and dogmatic philosophy of Empire but shows a mind-set which rejects cultural relativism and multiculturalism’. Overall, there was a great deal of diversity within each group – in all bar S2G1, only a minority picked up on the theme, yet the way they dealt with it showed more similarities across sites than within them.

#### 4.2.3 Overview

*Graph 3: Total % Response Across Groups to Source 2 (Top Two Themes)*



As in the case of Source 1, there is no sign of consistency in student perceptions of British imperialism evident in their responses either within sites or individual groups. However, in the case of Source 2 this difference is even more visible in the simple frequency graph (Graph 3). For example, there is a marked difference in frequency of students mentioning the theme of “Power” between S1G2 and S3G2 (across sites), or “Christian Civilisation” between S3G1 and S3G2 (within sites).

Also, similar to the data gathered about Source 1, the degree of diversity within groups upon what Source 2 reveals about the nature of British imperialism varies

markedly, especially within each coding category, between those who present the quotation as either a “positive” or more “critical” view of British imperialism. The detailed breakdown in the sections above shows that consistency of perceptions on the British Empire within groups is often hard to find.

#### **4.3 Questionnaire – Source 3 “British Officers”**



Source 3: Burke, 1878

© The British Library Board, PHOTO487 (44)

The third source in the student questionnaire was a photograph of British officers posing for a picture during the Second Afghan War. Like Source 1, the information provided with the photograph was basic, including the name of the photographer, the date of production, and the title “Group British Officers (Q.O.) Guides” (see Appendix 3). Despite being a photograph, unlike the artist’s impression of the “Negro Dance” in Source 1, the image still had the ability to portray a great deal of different things to different students, even when it came to the ethnicity of figures in the picture, where they were, and what the photographer was trying to convey.

Table 3: Occurrences of Thematic Coding in Responses to Source 3

Source 3	S1 G1 (17)	S1 G2 (5)	S2 G1 (14)	S2 G2 (9)	S3 G1 (9)	S3 G2 (6)	Total (60)
Pride	9	0	1	4	1	1	16
Inequality	8	2	10	3	8	4	35
Unity	1	1	0	2	1	2	7
Christian Civ	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Happiness	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Oppression	1	0	1	2	3	1	8
Power	7	3	6	3	4	3	26
Race	6	1	9	5	6	6	33
[Nil response]	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

Here, there were two clear key terms that arose most frequently: “Inequality” (35), and “Race” (33), though “Power” was a close third (26). Once again, the aim here is to display not only the ideas raised about the nature of British imperialism, but particularly how the students’ responses reflect a marked heterogeneity within and across teaching groups and sites.

#### 4.3.1 Inequality

As with Source 1, there was a strong element of overlap here between those who focused on “Inequality” and those focused on “Race,” though not always. In the case of Source 3 there was also more stress on class and hierarchy than for any of the other sources, as one might expect from an image of officers.

##### 4.3.1.1 Inequality (Based Largely on Ethnicity)

A number of students across the sites focused attention on the two soldiers who appear standing in the distance (far right), when they came to identify inequality within the British Empire. For S1G1, these figures showed: ‘there was racial hirearchy [sic]... You may also infer that there were natives in authority positions just for show’ (S1A), ‘men in the background [who] don’t seem to be British and are standing far away watching British Glory’ (S1B) or ‘looking off to the “British soldiers” getting their photograph taken... The British Empire was all about its hierarchy, the image of the empire was important...’ (S1E). Others similarly noted hierarchy, but emphasised how thin the figures looked: ‘two Indians... extremely thin, what shows that the British didn’t consider the Indians all equal, or even close to that, but mostly people just used for hard

work' (S1D) or 'two very underfed Indians looking on. Obviously they weren't meant to be in the photo yet they show a huge contrast between leaders and people. This says of the British empire that the Indian people were abused, underfed and forced into oppression' (S1I). This latter point was also noted by S1H who saw the figures as 'purposely excused [sic] from the image due to their colour and therefore place in society'. In contrast, only one student in S1G2 mentioned inequality in relation to ethnicity, and this was in a relatively positive light, in that despite the British officers remaining in positions of power: 'the one native officer [presumably the one seated on the far left in the foreground] could show how times were changing slightly, probably to settle natives who felt that the empire was too harsh' (S1T).

S2G1 also focused heavily on ethnicity as the link to inequality in the image. A significant vein of discussion focused on white supremacy: 'Only the pure white British were counted as British' (S2A), 'All white – being British meant you were white – not a multiracial nation yet. Other races were part of Britains [sic] efforts but they were sidelined and not as glorified as Britains [sic] own white soldiers' (S2B), 'they are also all white implying that the British Empire only admitted White British men to gain high ranks in their army' (S2D), 'Very racist as all officers are white in a comfortable shaded area. The men on the hill dressed as normal soliders are in the open and pretecting the White English' (S2J), 'This shows white supremacy and racism in the British Empire' (S2K). Others seemed to indicate that there were no non-white figures in the image, drawing similar conclusions to those above: 'The fact that there are no non-white officers and no non-white men are allowed in the picture shows the attitude of the British towards the other people in the Empire seeing non-white people lesser to themselves' (S2L), 'there aren't any Indian officers present in the picture. From this knowledge, the British didn't like the idea of having Indian people having the same status of power as they did... which could be seen as racist on their behalf' (S2E), and 'Due to all soldiers being white in the photograph, there may be segregation between the whites and the blacks, similar to the first source when all blacks were on their own' (S2N).

In S2G2, all of the responses related to "Inequality" also pointed to ethnicity as the deciding factor. For S2P this was 'in keeping with the general status quo of white-supremacy at the time. Indians or Pakistanis would not be considered "officer material" because of their race/skin colour' and S2S also saw the image as a sign of 'racial segregation [sic]'. However, like S1T, S2U felt that one of the officers in the foreground

might not have been of ‘British decent [sic],’ but rather than seeing this as a positive sign, it was seen as though this officer ‘may have been forced or pressured to be in the British army and to fight for the British side’. Overall, Site 2 saw the image very negatively indeed when it came to signs of inequality in the British Empire, and they saw this as based almost exclusively on racial ideologies of the time.

S3G1 gave evidence of more variety between individual student responses in relation to ethnicity, with a number citing ethnicity as well as class as key divisions and social distinctions within the empire. In terms of race, S3A, like many others across the sites, identifies all of the officers as ‘all white... there would certainly be no natives above them... reflecting the elitist nature of empire,’ S3G also raises the idea that the ‘Britis [sic] Empire’s officers were all white’. S3A points to the distant figures wearing turbans, in the same manner as S3B who speaks specifically of ‘Indian soldiers (the Punjab)... in the background and them being at the back of the source and not in the photo, portrays the nature of Empire as subjugation [sic]’. For S3D these were ‘two conflicting groups one would form a dominance over the other. Which by some could be interrupted [interpreted?] as duty others as racist oppression’. However, as shown in the next section, S3G1 also pointed to class distinctions almost as much as ethnic ones.

In S3G2, S3J noted the ‘demographic of the officers – all white, male, middle aged shows the high position priveledge [sic] and classist attitudes held in Imperial society’. However, the other two mentions of racial inequality, saw a clear disagreement between S3M and S3N. For S3N the ‘two men in the background are under-nourished, and their distance from the white British officers is potentially symbolic of the hierarchy created by the Empire. The source suggests the superiority of white British officers over the black soldiers fighting for them in their country of origin, highlighting the prejudices that the Empire created’ whereas S3M feels that ‘despite [the] a gap between the two groups – there is a united factor of them fighting together’.

#### ***4.3.1.2 Inequality (Via Rank and Status)***

Unlike the majority of their peers in S1G1, two students noted “inequality” without linking ethnicity directly to it. S1J noted the uniforms as showing the officers to be of ‘high rank’ and that the ‘British empire contained things which showed pomp and ceremony,’ and S1Q noted that the ‘British Empire placed British officers very high up in the hierarchy as the picture shows how smartly dressed and formal they look’. In

S1G2, only one student followed this line of observation, with S1V noting that the ‘British officers all look very polished educated and well off. Their uniforms are perfect, you can infer that they get paid alot and this money is not being used on the habitants [sic] of the land we claimed’.

At Site 2, only a couple of students, both in S2G1, saw implications of “inequality” in the image not directly linked to ethnicity. S2C saw the source showing ‘British officers looking important and superior. Superiority is vital to British Emperial [sic] behaviour. The British leaders for centuries had been conquering land and building itself up to be the most superior it can be which is largely reflected by the manner of the men in this picture,’ and S2H noted the soldiers in the background without reference to ethnicity: ‘The less decorative soldiers in the back, presumably of lower rank to that of officer, don’t get the luxury of shade. This source could also infere [sic] that soldiers of lower rank are seen as inferior to higher ranking officers’.

In S3G1, as noted above, a number of students pointed to “Inequality” via class, rather than simply by ethnicity, and two (S3G and S3D) spoke clearly of both. S3C hinted at ethnicity, but avoided it directly: ‘the people in charge would consistently be exclusively British and locals were rarely involved in decision making in their own countries’. While S3F saw in the image the notion that ‘the British still thought they were above most of the world as they were out for a jolly in Africa’. This arrogance was also detected by S3D: ‘it does show the belief of rich families sending out their eton, oxford, harrow educated boys out to Africa to have a little excitement [sic] to their lives’. S3H also linked into this idea of classism: ‘This shows that the British thought themselves to be more highly regarded than the people of the colony... This tells of the British aristocratic rule in the Empire,’ similar to S3G who notes that the ‘men seem to embody the image of British gentlemen which suggests that perhaps class also played a role’. More so than any other group, though not exclusively as shown here, S3G1 picked up on social class/standing as a key identifier of the officers in the image. In contrast, in Year 13 (S2G2) there was only a single clear mention of ‘classist attitudes’ (S3J) and this came after clear references to ethnicity. S3O did not mention ethnicity directly, but instead suggested that ‘the people of those countries within the Empire got no say of how their country was then further suggesting that Britain had full controll [sic] of the country without taking the people of that country into account’.

### 4.3.2 Race

Although this picture does indeed appear to include figures of different ethnicities, it is perhaps notable that so many of the students chose to focus upon this aspect, given the number of other themes that are also apparent in the image. Unlike Source 1, where the very title of the source spoke of racial division, the “racial” issue is less clearly defined in the image of the officers, leading to a good deal of speculation as to the presence of non-white figures in the image (for most students, this meant the two distant and barely distinct figures in the background). As there was a large overlap between mentions of “Race” and “Inequality” in this image, the following observations do not reiterate the discussion of inequality (by racial distinction) discussed in detail above, but rather focus instead upon other considerations regarding what the photograph might reveal about “Race” and the British Empire.

#### 4.3.2.1 Race (*Integration*)

Students from four of the six groups noted some element of integration in the image, rather than inequality: ‘British empire appears to be united with both British and Indians in this picture working together’ (S1G) and ‘shows that soliders of all ethnic backgrounds had the oportunity to progress in his madjestys forces even as far back as 1878 [sic]’ (S2T). Two other students from different sites noted unity through the army: ‘there are some non-white people in it, suggesting that even though they had an empire over other people they still fought together – as equals’ (S2O), and ‘Finally, the top right of the picture shows two black soldiers. This shows that despite there is a gap between the two groups – there is a united factor of them fighting together’ (S3M). A further two students from different sites, regarded one of the figures in the foreground as non-white suggesting a change in racist attitudes: ‘the one native officer could show how times were changing slightly, probably to settle natives who felt that the empire was too harsh’ (S1T) and ‘There is one native officer in the foreground which shows a willingness to accept foreigners into their ranks’ (S3L).

While the six students above saw some positive or progressive signs in the image, three other students saw any such associations as propagandistic in intent. S1A felt the image might ‘show that all race were equal, if any natives picked at that. But were not given any position of power [sic],’ just as S1E saw it giving ‘off the feeling they [non-white soldiers] have an importance in the event of imagery of the British



Empire taken place. As though they are the ones doing all the work, but the “officers” are the ones getting the credit for it’. S2F was the clearest in identifying propaganda though: ‘the left most guy seems to be darker skinned that [sic] the rest which I think means the photo has been taken for propaganda purposes to show no one is oppressed even though [sic] they are’.

Finally, linked to a number of observations in this section, two students again identified one of the figures in the foreground as non-white, but these two saw it as giving an entirely negative message. For S2K, ‘only one of these men seem to be of foregn [sic] background... This shows white supremacy and racism in the British Empire,’ and for S2U ‘the reluctant looking facial expression on the non-British soldier on the lefts [sic] face highlights that they may have been forced or pressured to be in the British army and to fight for the British side’.

#### **4.3.2.2 Race (Exclusion)**

As noted in the section on “Inequality”, most of the responses across sites focused on the idea that the two figures in the background indicated racial hierarchy. However, some saw the image mostly as glorifying the “white” British, with no mention of the figures in the background at all (S2A, S2D, S2E, S2N, S2P, S3G, S3J, S3K, S3O) – the bulk of whom come from S2G1 and S3G2.

Others saw the figures in the background as indicative of racial supremacy – and that their inclusion in the picture was largely to confirm this view: ‘purposely excused [sic]’ (S1H), ‘sidelined and not as glorified’ (S2B), ‘The men on the hill dressed as normal soliders are in the open and pretecting the White English [sic]’ (S2J), ‘the soldiers of the land stay out the tent and stand far away’ (S3H), and ‘their distance from the white British officers is potentially symbolic’ (S3N), with similar views reflected in the responses of S2S, S3A and S3D. These observations suggest that the figures were *included* to reinforce ideas of racial exclusion.

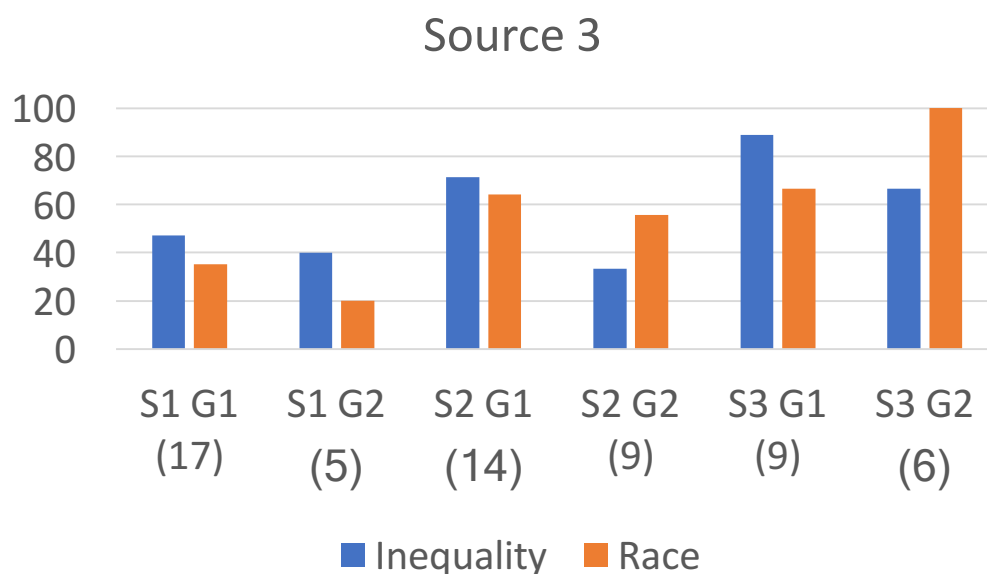
The final suggestion, seen from three students at different sites, was that the figures in the background were perhaps not supposed to have been in the image. Emphasis has been added to the first two students’ responses here to show the idea that they are excluded from the photo “proper”: ‘Also in the distant [sic] are two men who appear to be non-white, Indian as it appears that they are wearing a turban. The fact that there are no non-white officers and *no non-white men are allowed in the picture* shows

the attitude of the British towards the other people in the Empire’ (S2L) and ‘it can be seen that Indian soldiers (the Punjab) are in the background and them being at the back of the source *and not in the photo*, portrays the nature of Empire as subjugation [sic] rather than order’ (S3B). While S1I states this the most clearly: ‘Obviously they weren’t meant to be in the photo yet they show a huge contrast between leaders and people’. What is most evident in this discussion of race, and what Source 3 tells the viewer about race in the British Empire, is that there are no united perceptions within groups or within sites.

#### 4.3.3 Overview

As with the first two sources, Source 3 elicited a diversity of responses. Once again, and this has been stressed a little more in this section, it is also true that on a number of occasions the same minority points of view were raised by one or two students in different groups across sites. What this shows is that student perceptions of what Source 3 says about British imperialism are not wholly varied, but when they do repeat themselves this is likely to happen across sites, and not simply within groups taught by the same teacher (within sites). Graph 4 shows that, like Graph 3, the frequency at which themes were raised, even at a surface level, varied markedly between sites (S1G2 and S3G2 on “Race”) and within them (Site 2 on “Inequality”).

*Graph 4: Total % Response Across Groups to Source 3 (Top Two Themes)*



#### **4.4 Questionnaire – Source 4 “Declaration of Independence”**

The final source in the student questionnaire was an extract from the United States Declaration of Independence of 1776 (see Appendix 3). Although this is a relatively well-known document that is still quoted often, it played no role in the students’ AS/A Level courses and, as a result, students showed quite a varied range of comprehension – some students revealing a great deal of background knowledge, while others found it very difficult to interpret at all.

*Table 4: Occurrences of Thematic Coding in Responses to Source 4*

<b>Source 4</b>	<b>S1 G1 (17)</b>	<b>S1 G2 (5)</b>	<b>S2 G1 (14)</b>	<b>S2 G2 (9)</b>	<b>S3 G1 (9)</b>	<b>S3 G2 (6)</b>	<b>Total (60)</b>
<b>Pride</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Inequality</b>	3	1	4	0	2	5	15
<b>Unity</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Christian Civ</b>	0	0	0	1	2	0	3
<b>Happiness</b>	4	1	0	3	2	0	10
<b>Oppression</b>	6	4	12	5	7	6	40
<b>Power</b>	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
<b>Race</b>	0	0	3	1	3	0	7
<b>[Nil response]</b>	4	0	0	0	0	0	4

As shown in Table 4, the key themes were raised rarely across the groups when one looks beyond “Oppression” (40). However, for comparison with the other source discussions here, the next most frequently mentioned theme, “Inequality” (15) is also included.

##### **4.4.1 Oppression**

This category was the most frequently raised across all sites when it came to Source 4, which fits with the nature of the source, which is itself a critique of British imperial rule. In order to analyse them with more nuance, I have divided the responses into those who focused upon harshness/abuse, those who critiqued more broadly the empire’s unfairness, and those who focused specifically on the denial of human rights. Using only short quotations here often disguises the key word that allowed the coding in this section, however, in the bulk of cases, this came about through a quotation or paraphrasing of the source itself, followed by the comments used here.

#### ***4.4.1.1 Oppression (Tyranny)***

In terms of “Oppression” in its broadest form (with no focus on rights), only one student in S1G1 (S1O) made such a judgement. In S1G2 three students spoke of the empire as: ‘tyrannical and unjust’ (S1R), ‘very harsh at this time’ (S1T), and ‘suggests... mistreatment’ (S1V). Site 3, similar to Site 1, had relatively few responses along such general lines: in S3G1 ‘aggression and violence’ (S3F) was raised, and in S3G2 that the colonists were ‘slighted, mistreated and endured suffering’ (S3G) and that the empire was ‘too crushing and authoritarian-like’ (S3M).

S2G1 gave the most responses along these lines, contending that the source portrayed the empire as, variously: ‘threat [treat?] America badly’ (S2A), ‘controlling and bad’ (S2D), ‘oppressed the Americans... it implies other parts of the world are oppressed’ (S2F), ‘harsh and overpowering’ (S2J), ‘suppressed [sic] the American citizens and abused their trust’ (S2K), ‘destructive nature. ... a controlling and suppressive nature’ (S2M), and most tellingly of all perhaps, ‘The source shows the British Empire as an evil Empire’ (S2L). While S2G2 saw only S2V talk of tyrannical oppression and S2P describe the empire as of a ‘malignant and damaging nature’.

#### ***4.4.1.2 Oppression (Unfairness)***

The following students mentioned words such as “destructive” which led to the coding here, but elaborated upon this less decisively to do with oppression than the students above. These students could be found across all groups, but overall the fewest were found in Site 1. S1C felt ‘the empire didn’t bring them happiness’ (S1C), while others in Site 2 saw the source as showing the empire as: ‘may have been unfair’ (S2G), ‘not... responsible to its people’ (S2H), ‘didn’t look for the needs of the people’ (S2I), and ‘hadn’t treated their citizens right’ (S2O). In Site 3 students variously noted: ‘that the benevolence felt by the British is not a sentiment shared by their subject [sic] in all cases’ (S3C), ‘[the British] did not rule well there... the British empire was never popular’ (S3H), ‘the disadvantages and “wrongs” of Empire... for example not following popular opinion for the people in their colonies’ (S3I), ‘government that contravenes liberty, life and pursuit of happiness [sic]’ (S3J), and ruling in ‘unfair manner’ (S3L). For these students, though they quoted the language of “oppression,” their development of this was quite measured, almost more as a description of “unfairness” than tyranny. Two further students, perhaps indicating more knowledge of

the American Revolution, suggested economic “oppression”: ‘could be seen as oppressive because they imposed huge taxes that people could not afford to pay’ (S1F), and ‘exploitation, that the British did not care for the colonies they had and were merely interested in money’ (S3B).

#### ***4.4.1.3 Oppression (Human Rights)***

The final group of students, found across all sites and groups, except S3G1, used the language of “Oppression” to discuss the denial of basic “rights,” which fits closely with the language of the Declaration itself and, in some respects, it is surprising that so few responses used the word “rights” overall. S1I, S1P and S1S all spoke of ‘human rights,’ S2Q and S3O spoke of ‘rights of the people,’ while others spoke of oppression through denying Americans: ‘people’s rights’ (S1Q), ‘basic rights’ (S2C), ‘their right to rule themselves’ (S2S), ‘the right to overthrow of a repressive government’ (S3N) and ‘rights and privileges’ (S3K).

#### **4.4.2 Inequality**

Given that the first line of the excerpt contains the famous phrase: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,’ the disparity between the number of students who mentioned inequality in their responses is rather marked. For example, nobody in S2G2 mentioned the theme at all, whereas five out of six students in S3G2 made it a clear focus.

In S1G1 three students referred to inequality. Two reiterated the theme of the argument in the Declaration itself: how ‘unequal the British government is’ (S1G) and ‘they are not treating all people as equal, but putting the British above everyone else,’ (S1Q). While S1E gave a more nuanced interpretation, seeing inequality in how the language of the document disregarded women. In S1G2, just S1T pointed to the fact the British empire ‘did not give equality to the people in America’.

Students at S2G1 made a few references along the lines of the inequality stated in the document itself, though at times with some misunderstanding/misreading of the text. S2B sees the document as showing that the British Empire was ‘not “equal”,’ while S2E states that the Declaration says that ‘not being treated as an equal is destructive’. S2F suggests merely that the source ‘implies’ that the empire was not

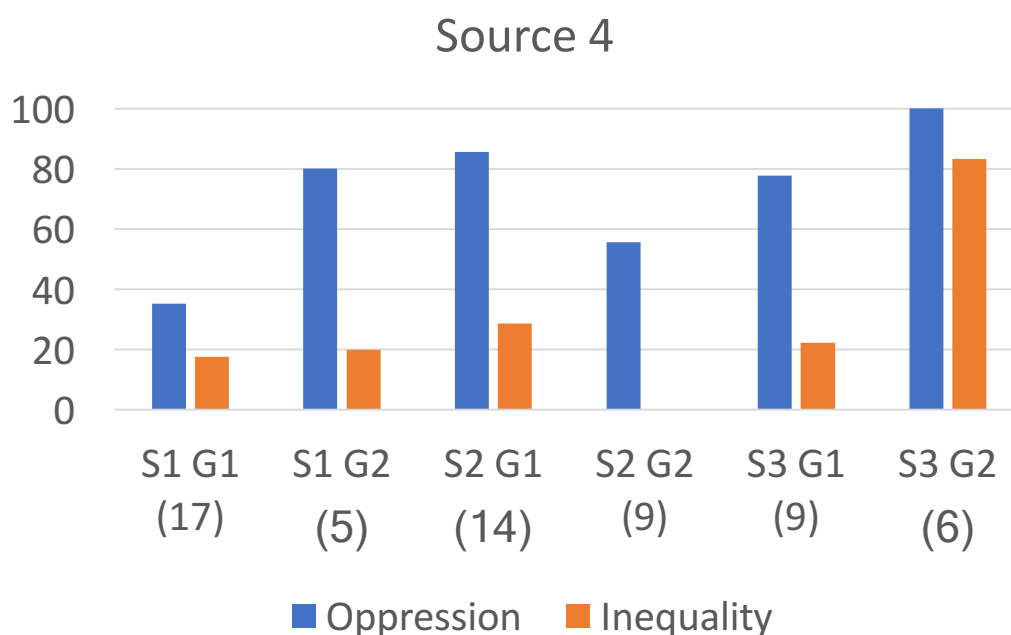
equal, and S2N posits that the document is encouraging Britain to ‘stop segregation and keep equality’. As noted earlier, S2G2 made no direct references to “inequality” at all.

In Site 3, though a couple of students in S3G1 mentioned inequality, almost all students in S3G2 did. In S3G1, S3A contrasted the inequality of the ‘conservative British’ with the “Americans”, while S3D seems to critique the Americans as well, looking to slavery as evidence the Americans kept elements of inequality. However, in S3G2, far more emphasis was placed on “inequality” than in any of the other groups. S3J saw British actions in India (not the Americas) as evidence of inequality, but appears to see the Declaration as the work of Britain’s ‘greatest ally,’ which might suggest some confusion of the role of the American colonies in the debates over imperialism at this time. S3K, in contrast, understood the context of the source and pointed to the source as evidence of Britain permitting and restricting rights on an unequal basis, similar to S3M who saw unequal treatment as a sign of the empire’s ‘higherarchy of privilages [sic],’ while S3O suggested simply that the British ‘did not provide them [the American colonists] with equality’. S3L veered away from the others in their discussion of inequality, seeing the source as evidence that the ‘British perhaps did not trust their colonists/subjects equally’. Overall, however, despite their differences in emphasis, this group picked up on the idea on “inequality” at a far higher rate than any of the others.

#### **4.4.3 Overview**

As in the previous three sections in this chapter, presented below is a graph that outlines the frequency with which the students mentioned the key terms that were picked up while coding the information. For Source 4 only one theme was raised by a substantial number of students across sites, but nevertheless some clear disparities are evident once again both within sites (“Oppression” at Site 1, and “Inequality” at Site 2), as well as across different sites. Again, in common with the previous three sources, there was also great diversity in the way in which students within and across groups addressed each theme they mentioned – as shown in the paragraphs above.

*Graph 5: Total % Response Across Groups to Source 4 (Top Two Themes)*



#### **4.5 Summary of Questionnaire Data**

Although the data is contextualised in greater detail in Chapter 5, it is useful to briefly overview the data discussed above, especially given the length of narrative detail contained therein. As noted on a number of occasions, the primary aim of displaying the data above in such detail was to show the diversity of student responses to the stimulus material. Graph 1 shows that although sometimes the frequency with which themes were raised by the students sometimes does not appear that different across groups, as Graph 2 shows, this similarity diminishes when one looks at what the students actually said in more detail. This can be seen both between sites, within sites and within individual groups.

For some classroom teachers who see this data, such results might seem unremarkable. However, to a large extent, this is exactly the point that needs to be made. The national political and media debate about the power of the written curriculum (curriculum as syllabus) and teachers to shape student understanding seems to assume that students are highly susceptible to what they are told. The controversy over the place of British imperialism in the curriculum seems to rest largely on the assumption that content and teaching are the main drivers in leading to the resulting student perceptions of History (and imperial history). What the responses outlined

above suggest is that there is little evidence – even when taught by the same teacher, the same topic (an in-depth exploration of one part of British imperial history) – that students draw the same sorts of conclusions when presented with *unfamiliar* sources and are asked what these tell them about British imperialism. If this does seem unremarkable to a classroom teacher, then that might be precisely the reason it needs to be stated clearly here, as it would appear that this seemingly unremarkable finding – at least in part – strikes at the heart of the national debate; a debate which had little place for teacher and educationalist input (as noted by Haydn, 2012).

Despite the heterogeneity of responses across and within sites when student perceptions of the empire are discussed above, the data gathered tend to imply that teaching and content were not the key determinants in forming student perceptions, rather than suggest – if this is indeed the case – what the key determining factors actually are. In addition, the questionnaires, in attempting to gauge student perceptions via using their historical skills in a written, formal manner, do not give much of an indication as to how students perceive the topic and its relevance to their education. Nor indeed, do these results give any voice to the teachers, whose role in shaping student perceptions seems to be less overarching than some media commentators might have one believe. Therefore, in addition to further evidencing the implications of the data provided above, the other two types of data that follow seek to address the other key questions raised in this thesis in far greater detail.

#### **4.6 Student Focus Groups**

The student focus group interviews aimed to ease the students into discussion of British imperialism with the confidence gained from the written responses to the questionnaires. At each site the students were asked a series of questions as a group immediately after the completion of their questionnaires, copies of which they kept until the end of the interview. The first five questions (see Appendix 4) acted as a bridge between the questionnaires and a more open discussion of student perceptions of imperialism. These initial questions focused on the four sources, and were probed to see whether the students simply reiterated their written responses, or whether the group dynamic offered new directions for discussion. The questions also aimed to get students to form judgements on the sources slightly more strongly than in the questionnaires, with a view to stimulating discussion before moving on to the later questions. The



second half of the questions in the focus group interview were focused not on the questionnaire sources, but upon the key questions and ideas that informed the study and arose largely from the ongoing debates among educationalists and politicians.

To avoid over-repetition of ideas raised in the previous section, this section of the chapter not only overviews the correlation of the eight themes addressed in the questionnaires in relation to the focus group discussion (for the first five questions), but also highlights other themes that came to the fore in discussions that are relevant to the debates over teaching imperial history which were raised in the literature review. In addition, given that there is far less focus group data than questionnaire data, a larger variety of the key themes that arose are discussed in the following section than there was space for when it came to the questionnaires – allowing for a greater insight into the views of the students across both forms of data collection. For the final four questions in the focus group interview, the data is presented in a thematic manner, organised around themes that students raised in the interview itself.

#### **4.6.1 Source 1**

The first two questions in the focus group interview related directly to Source 1, which was projected on a white board in each of the three classrooms, and was available on the student questionnaires for reference:

Question 1: Do you think this picture is a good example of what the British Empire was like?

Question 2: Do you think that it tells us anything about the role of race in the British Empire?

##### ***4.6.1.1 The Four Key Themes***

In the questionnaires, the four main themes raised by Source 1 were “Race” (50), “Happiness” (41), “Inequality” (24) and “Oppression” (15).<sup>21</sup> The focus group interviews saw the same themes echoed but, though “Race” featured heavily, other themes took up less discussion time. One of the obvious reasons for this is that Question 2 was focused heavily on “Race” to stimulate discussion around that theme. However, the focus groups focused upon a smaller number of subthemes than were represented in

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<sup>21</sup> Numbers in parentheses indicates the number of student responses across all six groups, out of a maximum of 60.

the questionnaires, some of which was no doubt accounted for by the dominance of some voices and the stimulating nature of group discussion. When it came to “Race”, the idea that Source 1 was an image created for anthropological purposes, for example, was reserved to three groups (S1G2, and S3G1&2) – this differed from the questionnaires slightly where there were no mentions at Site 1, but a couple of very interesting ones at S2G2. In the focus groups, one student at S1G2 suggested that the British were ‘interested and intrigued,’ akin to others at S3G1 who felt the British took an interest in their colonial subjects to show the people in Britain who they rule, to document native culture, or to justify a civilising mission. In S3G2 students spoke similarly of a curiosity and a desire to ‘observe other cultures’.

Where the majority of questionnaire responses across the sites had focused on a seemingly negative presentation of the non-white figures in the image, there was less discussion of this in the focus groups, with only four out of six groups giving it substantial discussion. Some members of S1G2 identified a dramatisation of the black figures in the picture as ‘grotesque, poor, primitive,’ while others at S2G1 felt the artist’s “British” gaze tried to create an impression of those portrayed as, variously: uncivilised, chaotic and strange/different. At S3G1, one of the students suggested that the figures were presented as ‘subhuman,’ while at S3G2 another suggested a ‘warped view of other cultures...demonization...dehumanisation’. On the final subtheme of “separation”, the focus groups echoed the frequency of discussion in the questionnaires, with students at S1G1 mentioning it far more than any others: ‘not mixing both of the groups’ and ‘within their own race,’ while there were fewer mentions at the other sites: at S2G2 one student talked of separation and at S3G2 another said the British were ‘trying to separate cultures’.

Moving on to the second most common theme in the questionnaires, “Happiness”, the focus groups once again mirrored the ideas of “critical” and “uncritical” discussion of happiness as had occurred in the questionnaires. In terms of uncritical responses, in S1G2 one student suggested that it gave ‘the impression that the British were kind,’ in S2G1 another suggested it showed the British ‘being a lot more liberal and allowing the black people to live their lives as they normally would...’, and at S3G2 another simply saw people who were ‘really happy’. In contrast, just as in the questionnaires, some saw happiness that was more a guise than a reality. At S1G1 one student felt that ‘although they look happy’ when one looks closely there appears to be evidence of poverty, while another suggested the “happiness” portrayed is the artist’s

opinion. Building on a similar idea, a student at S2G1 focused on the idea of propaganda, making people look “happy” under British rule and another at S2G2 saw the image as ‘fairly celebratory’ but very much a ‘the British’s opinion [sic]’.

In terms of the third theme, “Inequality”, whereas their questionnaires focused heavily on the title of the image, in the interview with S1G1 only one student raised this and that was in fleeting response to the second question, with a similar sort of response arising at S2G1. In S1G2 and S2G2, again, only one student at each spoke of racial supremacy/superiority. While in S3G1, one student rather unfortunately stated: ‘it makes the Negro seem sub-human... but I wouldn’t say it’s doing that in a negative way... they’re just looking at it... from a superior place and like they’re inferior but it’s not as if that’s necessarily like a bad thing’. In terms of “relative poverty,” S1G1 noted that the figures’ ‘clothing isn’t great,’ and at S2G1 relative poverty was raised comparing the ‘hut’ lived in by the black figures and comparing it with the ‘nice-ish house in the background’. As in the questionnaires, students at Site 3 again failed to point to poverty or living conditions when in the focus group environment. Overall, however, inequality did not stimulate a great deal of discussion in the groups.

Finally, in the focus groups, the theme of “oppression” was seldom raised, but both times it did arise, it arose in reference to slavery. In S1G2 one student pointed out that the British were quicker to abolish slavery, suggesting the image might show Sierra Leone (a colony set up for freed persons of colour), while another at S2G2 suggested it was produced when slavery was ‘still going quite strong’ for the British. In both cases the issue of slavery, which might well be an issue that is relevant to the image, is raised in partially (or wholly) inaccurate contexts. Slavery was not abolished when Sierra Leone became a colony for the resettlement of freed blacks in the late-eighteenth century, but it was by the time the picture (which is of a Caribbean plantation) was printed. Overall, however, the main themes raised in the questionnaires arose once more in the focus group interviews, and like the questionnaires, there was a remarkable degree of heterogeneity within groups and sites regarding what students identified about British imperialism from Source 1.

#### ***4.6.1.2 Divergence***

One instance of divergence between the interviews and the questionnaires arose over liberalism and authoritarianism. Where quite a few students mentioned that the people

in the image had been left to their own culture in the questionnaires, the more common theme in the focus groups was that of cultural imposition by the British. This was raised at S2G1 and at S2G2 (and by S2M and S2P in the questionnaires), though in the latter case, students in the group disagreed about the issue (but thought they were agreeing), and at S3G2 one further student saw the house in the background as a sign of westernisation, of ‘two worlds colliding’. So, though the same groups raised these points, where it was a small element of the questionnaires overall, it provoked more discussion (and consequently loomed larger) in the focus groups.

Finally, one theme that did not appear in the questionnaires, but did arise in two of the focus groups was the idea of generalisability: that the image was *a* view of the British Empire, but only one dimension of it. This is an issue that arises in the literature review, given that the topic of “British imperialism” is so varied and wide-ranging. This new theme arose in S1G1 through discussion about it being only one example, and for a ‘small group of people,’ and in S3G1 there was a lot of discussion of it being ‘over-exaggerated, trying to pack everything in,’ or the fact it was ‘only one village... it seems a bit specific’ (along with things that might be missing, such as soldiers). This idea was raised again in response to later questions, as discussed below.

#### **4.6.2 Source 3**

Rather than dealing with Source 2, this section considers the second pictorial source (Source 3), and the sections here follow the order in which subjects were raised in the focus group interviews. The two questions directed towards Source 3 were exactly the same as those posed for Source 1. Again, the image was projected onto a white board in each of the three classrooms, and was available on the student questionnaires for reference:

Question 3: Do you think this picture a good example of what the British Empire was like?

Question 4: Do you think that it tells us anything about the role of race in the British Empire?

##### ***4.6.2.1 The Four Key Themes***

In the questionnaires, the four most frequent themes that arose were: “Inequality” (35), “Race” (33), “Power” (26) and “Pride” (16). When it came to the first two themes,

which were difficult enough to separate in the questionnaires (with “Race” essentially becoming simply any discussion of race that veered away from direct discussion of “Inequality”), in the focus groups it became almost impossible to separate them at all. To an extent, this was because the conversations veered and overlapped more, and the focus groups tended – across groups and sites – to discuss these elements of the image to the exclusion of almost anything else (far more so than in the questionnaires).

In terms of “Inequality”, students at S1G1 focused attention on the figures in the background and how they looked ‘underfed’ and illustrated the ‘contrast between the British and the Indian,’ with one saying this gave a ‘clear sense of hierarchy’ in the Empire. In S2G1, one student suggested ‘like they prioritise themselves as white British over those of the colonies of the empire... kinda like from what like we’ve been doing about India and stuff like that’. Here came an overt glimpse of a student making a clear reference to forming an opinion based on information gleaned in class, something more evident in the focus groups than in the questionnaires. S2G2, like S1G2, saw the group dynamic lead to students coming to more communal decisions on this image, largely by correcting the observations of others. Again, one student led by saying that the image was ‘all white,’ only for another to point out the figures in the background, for them to both then suggest that this indicated inequality, and another to add that this inequality expanded to women. Students at S3G1 led with the observation of the division between those in the foreground and the pair in the background, with one student concluding that ‘it shows the separation and almost the clash between the two ideologies – how different they were’. Another student commented that the visual separation was ‘purposeful,’ a different member of the group added that, if the photographer had wished them not to be there, then they would not be, and that the fact that they are ‘quite literally, out of focus’ should be read as intended. A student at S3G2 again led with the idea of ‘all white officers,’ then another suggested ‘black soldiers in the background,’ while another responded that this was representative of a ‘chain of command’ and this included the figure seated in the foreground on the far left: ‘such a hierarchy’. In summary, one student concluded that the non-white soldiers were seen as ‘second-class citizens,’ a comment that met with general agreement in the group and ended the discussion on this source. What was clear here was how much interaction and argumentation helped to steer the focus of the groups towards a small number of themes, rather than the more evenly spread analysis seen in the individual questionnaires.

Aside from the substantial focus on the theme of “Inequality” when it came to race in Source 3, across all sites, students at Site 1 did go off on some different tangents to suggest more inclusion and unity of when it came to ethnicity or “race”. One student at S1G1 reasoned that the shared uniform and status in the picture signified that ‘they weren’t as divided’ as they might seem, and might actually have the ‘same amount of power’. A further student felt that perhaps the attention on the figures in the background was misplaced and that the seated figure in the foreground was Indian as well. Similarly, at S1G2 two students discussed whether the figures in the foreground were all white. One led with this idea, before the other suggested both a figure on the far left and the two figures in the background were non-white. The first student then built upon the other’s recognition of non-white figures to suggest the image showed ‘they’re trying to inter-... get everyone involved in the empire. Maybe, open boundaries, social classes,’ then a third student added it might show ‘the British were kind of open to other nationalities’. Another student then suggested that ‘it wouldn’t be, like, if it was like an Indian army, you wouldn’t be thinking why isn’t there a white officer’.

The theme of “Power” came up far less frequently in the focus group discussions (only half of the groups mentioned it). In S1G1 one student noted that the image aimed to make the ‘British Empire look strong’ and noted the military uniforms and guns in the foreground. In S1G2 another student suggested that the image was a sort of propaganda, showing the empire as ‘very intimidating and powerful,’ built upon the military (‘a fierce army’) which could at once be seen as ‘protective, or as domineering and violent’. Finally, in S3G1 two further students then discussed the uniform and dress and how this connoted ‘authority’ and ‘pomposity’ but, ultimately, they were dressed to do their job. Another student built upon this, suggesting the uniforms themselves were likely a form of ‘soft power,’ enabling them to impose themselves and their Britishness. Building on this once again, a different student suggested the domination over the desert landscape, with the incongruous furniture. Overall, however, a theme that had arisen fairly consistently in the questionnaires across all groups, became far less prominent in group discussions. There is a case to be made for suspecting that students might have been less keen to discuss imperial “Power” in front of their peers, but this is difficult to prove.

“Pride” was the fourth most frequently mentioned theme in the questionnaires, and it dropped off even further in the focus groups. Where in S1G1’s questionnaires, a good number of students raised the issue of “Pride” in response to Source 3, in the focus

group nobody raised this at all. In fact, only two students raised it across all six groups: in S2G2 one suggested the image showed ‘a great sense of, almost, pride in what they do’ and at S3G1: ‘it, like, shows their pride, you know, in their empire’. Like the decline in the prominence of “Power”, some of this was likely down to the second question being targeted on the theme of “Race”. Unlike Source 1, Source 3 did not elicit any distinct divergence from the main themes addressed in the questionnaires.

#### **4.6.3 Sources 2 and 4**

The fifth question for the focus group asked them to look again at Sources 2 and 4 (the textual sources), and decide “Which of these do you think gives us the best example of what the British Empire was like in reality?”. The question was aimed at trying to stimulate responses from the students that would not simply reiterate the messages of the sources, which, as noted above, are perhaps less open to interpretation than the images. However, the question also aimed to achieve two specific goals – to see whether students saw a “positive” or “negative” interpretation of the British Empire as the most “realistic,” and whether they raised the issue of a “best example” being something temporally relevant. This aimed to further bridge the students from the structure of their questionnaire responses to the more flowing and discursive nature of the focus group interview. For the sake of avoiding simply restating each discussion in narrative detail, I have not reiterated the students who simply spoke of the relative messages of the sources, without reference to which was the “best example” or to “chronological difference”.

##### ***4.6.3.1 “Finest Hour” – More Positive***

Students at S1G1 saw the Churchill source as evidence of British ideas of empire, but not as the “best example” of what the British Empire was really like. One student at S1G2 argued that the Churchill source was better, but then recanted when challenged by a fellow student and came to the revised conclusion that it depended on what period you wanted to study (see Section 4.6.3.3). The first response from a student at S3G1 was that Churchill’s speech provided the best example of what the empire was like, because it ‘so stinks of pro-Empire,’ here the student referred to his “knowledge” of Churchill inferring a link to taught History. At S3G2 the students spent a very long time responding to this question compared with other sites. The first student suggested that

Churchill's speech was 'definitely' a better example of what the empire was like, without really justifying this decision, he then spoke of 'preservation of tradition,' while another student broke in to speak of patriotism, and later of propaganda in terms of why it would be better in representing the empire.

#### ***4.6.3.2 "Declaration of Independence" – More Negative***

The only unprompted response from S1G1 that pointed to the Declaration of Independence as the better representation, suggested this was because 'the British *were* doing quite a bit wrong' [emphasis added]. One student at S2G1 said the Declaration of Independence was better as it was 'a lot more unbiased' and a 'direct response' to imperialism, whereas Churchill is 'trying to inspire people' and would see it in 'a different way to someone who's being suppressed by it'. A student at S3G1 suggested that the Declaration of Independence was the better source, 'though both of them are propaganda, one's against the British and one's for the British and they're in completely different times'. He suggested, despite challenges from others in the room, that the Declaration was better as it represented a point of view that had a resurgence after World War Two 'in nationalist movements in Africa and India, you know, you can stand up against the British...'. So, in this and one other student's opinion, the earlier source had more of a continuing resonance, and again class learning seemed to heavily influence the reasoning behind this (Indian and African independence movements). Similarly, in S3G2, one student suggested this was the better source, as the American colonists had lived through British imperialism. Another student said the Declaration was better because it was what the empire was 'actually' like whereas Churchill's speech was how the 'British people thought of themselves'. Overall, there was no clear "winner," nor indeed any real unanimity between groups/sites as to which source was a "better" presentation of the British Empire.

#### ***4.6.3.3 Chronological Distinction***

A final idea that arose across the sites was the idea that poses a continual challenge to those seeking to teach British imperialism: its vast scale, and that one case study does not readily allow one to draw broader conclusions about imperialism – something that arose to an extent in response to the earlier questions. For example, one student at S1G2 suggested that Churchill's speech was a better portrayal, but then went on to note that



the aims of both sources were ‘very different’ with one trying to show the empire as ‘perfectly good,’ and the other ‘as this tyrannical usurper’. Another student queried this reading of the Declaration of Independence, saying they thought it showed the empire as ‘very liberal’. Finally, the student who suggested Churchill’s speech was the most useful, then said each source presented the empire ‘at different points in time’ and their utility depended on your question.

At S2G2 although many students suggested the pros and cons of the sources, there was little clear focus on why one source might be a better representation of British imperialism than the other. However, the students at this site did raise the idea that ‘time difference’ was an issue and suggested after the time that had elapsed between 1776 and 1940 the British Empire was ‘a different empire entirely’. In S3G2 a similar sentiment was raised, with one student concluding that the sources were equally useful to present different perceptions of the British Empire ‘just [in] different situations,’ while another noted that inequality in the empire continued over time, looking to India in the ‘later, more civilised, empire’.

Overall, the students seemed to find it more difficult to relate back to the real focus of the question when it came to the written sources. Whereas they found it relatively easy to suggest that the pictorial sources told the viewer broader things about empire, even if indirectly (unofficially), they tended to (though not entirely so) reiterate how the US Declaration of Independence and Churchill’s speech presented empire, rather than saying which one gave a better example of the empire. Nevertheless, the student responses did offer some interesting reflections on using primary sources to develop ideas about imperialism and once again highlighted that despite a common core knowledge of British imperialism from the classroom, students were able to draw quite divergent conclusions about the British Empire from short source extracts.

#### **4.6.4 Non-Source-Based Questions**

The second half of the questions posed to the focus group aimed at moving students away from the source materials and more directly onto the key questions at the heart of this study. When approaching the focus group responses beyond the questions focused on the questionnaire sources, the themes raised in the questionnaires were far less relevant. Thus, when approaching Questions 6 to 9, the interview data was coded across groups to identify themes that arose from the data itself. The focus group data was far

less word-heavy than the questionnaires, and thus by drawing up a short list of themes that arose, I was able to identify several sub-categories from across the groups, and those sub-categories are used here as subheadings assigned to the data.

#### **4.6.5 Question 6 – Importance**

Question 6 was: “Do you think that it is important for us to learn about Britain’s imperial history, and (if so, or if not) why?”. This question lies at the heart of this study and was unlikely to be addressed directly in the questionnaires. Both the student focus groups and the teacher interviews allowed for more overt discussion of student and teacher perceptions about the role of imperial history in schools. Here the answers to Question 6 are divided into the common themes that arose in the six focus group discussions across the three sites.

##### ***4.6.5.1 Understanding the Present***

The most common idea found across the sites was that learning about imperial history helps one to understand the present, something that links closely to ideas raised by media commentators like Jeremy Paxman (2012) and educationalists such as Grever, Pelzer and Haydn (2011, 226), who argue that ‘if we want a school history curriculum which connects with the interests and concerns of young people, we need a revised, globally situated and open history of nation-states, and a balancing of local, national, and global histories’. The history of British imperialism, as many of the students interviewed here noted, allows young people in Britain today to feel connected to a history that has real resonance in the present day.

A concept closely linked to this that arose across a number of groups in Sites 1 and 3, was the idea that history repeats itself, variously: ‘so you don’t repeat the mistakes of the past’ (S1G1), ‘It teaches us that history does repeat itself’ (S1G1), ‘I think with history there are always ricochets right up to the present day’ (S1G2), ‘History repeats itself... it really puts things into perspective’ (S3G1), and in S3G2, that one ‘Can learn lessons from the past as well, sort of mistakes’. There was a sense that learning about imperial history was important, because one could learn from it, and ultimately not repeat the mistakes that were made.

A second theme that was evident was seeing the idea that it informs the present-day nature of British life, though this did not always come across all that clearly. In

S1G1, a student suggested relatively vaguely that it was important because ‘it’s where we’ve come from basically, that make sense?’. At Site 2, a Year 13 student remarked ‘that a lot of the wealth in this country would’ve originally come [sic] from the slave trade’ (S2G2). In Year 12 at Site 3, one student suggested ‘it’s a massive part of our heritage and culture’. At S3G2 one student simply said: ‘I think it’s important because it’s the country, like, we’ve lived in therefore I think it’s important to understand the history behind it’. Another student in the same group put it a little differently: ‘I think it [imperial history] like relates to nowadays like the empire and you go to America you’re going to learn about American history and if you’re in Britain it ought to be British history’.

However, the only theme that spanned the groups was that of the empire’s effects overseas (and consequently on Britain’s relationships overseas), which could still be seen today: ‘it still has a lasting effect, like there’s still countries, like that are angry about it and there’s still countries that kinda feel the effect of the British Empire’ (S1G1), ‘you can see the effects and impact of the empire in places in India, at especially South Africa, Africa, America, so I think it is good to learn it’ (S1G2), ‘it kind of explains why [there is deprivation in Africa] and it tells you that a lot of the reason for these countries being so um, being in the mess that they are, is because maybe we could’ve, um, cause of Britain and what they’ve done to them’ (S2G1), ‘without knowing about the empire... there’s not really any way you can understand why Britain has a fairly prominent role in world politics... like former dominance affects like how our politics interacts now, especially with like former colonies like India or South Africa and stuff’ (S2G2), ‘a lot of people won’t know what the Commonwealth Games is [among other things]... so it’s quite important to know how Britain are connected to all these different countries and how like the world is today because of what happened before’ (S2G2). Another student at S2G2 pointed to the tensions between India and Pakistan, or Palestine and Israel, while a classmate pointed to Ireland. Finally, in S3G1 a few students also noted similarly: ‘it explains so much of why there’s problems in the world right now,’ ‘why our international relationships are, how they are...,’ and simply that it ‘affects so much of the world’.

#### ***4.6.5.2 Giving a More Nuanced Appreciation***

Another theme that was raised by students, was that learning about the empire was important because it helped one gain a better, more nuanced understanding of the past: a

primary theme raised in the interviews with teachers. In S1G1, one student revealed that: 'I kind of thought before that British Empire was like doing all they can for other countries, but studying it I realised that it was quite oppressive about like the strict hierarchy and how all they were mainly interested in was like economic benefit'. Another suggested simply that it was 'important to get both sides of the story... make you own decision' (S1G1), similarly a student at S3G2 mentioned 'learning it from like the other country's point of view is like really important,' suggesting again that it could lead to a more nuanced understanding. In S2G1, one student felt that, 'otherwise you sort of come across with the opinion that this is a really good country and stuff and then you study things like WW2 and you see Hitler and like oppressing Jews and you think like oh, we were the good guys and that but to be fair we were a lot worse for a lot longer'. Interestingly, the focus of two of these students was to stress that the influence of studying the empire had been to lead them away from a wholly positive view of empire, which one must assume they previously had harboured. For one student at S3G2, it was important to learn about the empire because 'it was once a huge force in the world for a very long time and it changed so much,' showing an appreciation for the issue of change over time, that arose in other parts of the focus group interviews, while for another 'it is like getting a wider viewpoint'.

#### ***4.6.5.3 Practical Reasons***

This theme arose only in S3G1, and suggested that there were practical benefits to studying the history of British imperialism, particularly the early-twentieth century. Since its history stretches into modernity, one student noted, 'we can get stories from our grandparents, our great-grandparents,' adding a personal interest. Another said, they found themselves better able to 'relate' to the people being studied, less 'detached'. A third student noted that '...it's so well documented, it would be pointless to ignore it and not teach it'. Although an interesting line of argument, this did illustrate something of a narrowness of view in terms of what constitutes British imperial history – many of the comments from S3G1 seemed to focus almost entirely on very modern history, particularly the Second World War and immediate post-war period.

#### ***4.6.5.4 Still Problems to be Overcome?***

A couple of final student comments are worth including here, even though they do not speak directly to the questions asked. Firstly, one student at S3G2 pointed out that an

issue that does need to be addressed with imperial history is that ‘it was quite a long empire, it just depends which periods it’s most important to study’. While another expressed it thus:

I think, um, it is really important to learn, but I think in the way that it’s taught as well is a bit old, cos we get taught it in almost an imperialist way, like with Britain, like we learn it as Britain as the centre and all these colonies, and the way we learn about it still makes Britain seems like, we’re still strong and we’ve got stuff to be proud of and, um, and when we um, discuss the colonies and stuff it’s almost as if we’re still getting this sense of pity on them... so it does, it’s funny how it’s still taught, still feeling like it’s an imperial... like, like still with an imperialist view a bit, we’re Britain as the centre of everything (S3G1).

This very valuable comment speaks directly to issues considered in the study and goes beyond the prompts and focuses of my questions. Such a reflective comment speaks very strongly to the views of leftist critics of the teaching of imperial history noted in the literature review, but it a very rare example, and one that certainly contrasts with the intentions laid out by all three teachers in their interviews.

#### **4.6.6 Questions 7 & 8 – Relevance/Resonance**

Question 7 asked the students “Do you think that studying British imperial history is relevant?” and Question 8, somewhat differently, “Does it tell us anything about Britain today?”. Prompts that were used across the groups, when the matters did not arise naturally, were “British society” and “British foreign policy”. In Questions 7 and 8, the responses across the groups were so interlinked that rather than artificially maintain a separation, the responses to both questions have been brought together here. There were two main themes that arose across the groups in different respects: namely, the impacts of British imperialism on Britain itself, and the impact on Britain’s relations with countries overseas. Although these issues arose somewhat differently and were discussed in varied levels of depth, both the domestic and international relations implications of British imperialism were commented upon by students across the sites.

##### ***4.6.6.1 Relevance through clear continuing impact on Britain***

When it came to the domestic impact of imperialism, most of the relevant responses came from Sites 1 and 2, with Site 3 really focusing far more on foreign policy. One student at S1G1 noted, somewhat obliquely, that imperial history’s relevance came

from the fact that it was ‘similar to what’s going on today, but also, you know, it’s still continuing’. Here, at best, one can infer that the student was noting the ongoing impact of imperialism on Britain, a sentiment more clearly raised by a couple of students at Sites 2 and 3. One student at S2G1, suggested that ‘[the] mentality of British people like... I dunno, they’re superior to other races... I guess is still ingrained today...it’s still there it’s just not as obvious as it was before’. Similarly, one student in S3G1 said that ‘...we’ve got this ideology that we need to help people from the empire [and Commonwealth] and I think maybe a sense of superiority as well that we’ve inherited from the empire as well’. Taken together, these last two sentiments link quite closely to what several commentators see as an ongoing link between imperial-racial ideologies and modern-day British culture (Porter, 2004, 314-316).

Despite that last student comment, many of the students who focused on ethnicity and multiculturalism tended to draw relatively neutral or positive conclusions. One student at S1G2 spent quite a lot of time discussing the fact that learning about British imperial history helped one to understand modern multicultural Britain, similar to another at S2G1, who suggested it might help understand how the government and the British people have changed, and one at S2G2 who suggested it gives ‘an understanding about kind of differences and like relevant like modern-day politics and well as the historic politics’.

A student at S1G2 argued that ‘if we didn’t have the empire we wouldn’t have such a multicultural country as we do today’ with an appreciation that this goes back beyond the twentieth century, and that ‘the British Empire also united Britain around the world, the Gurkhas that fought to us, um the Indians that fought for us in World War I, how much we actually owe to other countries that strengthened our power. So it’s not all bad. I think it taught Britain to be more open-minded to forget the white superiority...’. It is interesting to note how the student concludes that the fact Britain had such an extensive imperial history, in her opinion, meant that the British were less discriminatory towards minorities as a result. In a related comment, at S2G2 one student pointed to her own peers:

if you look around at like our class now like, obviously not everyone is kind of white British, whereas you, you don’t really get an understanding of how all these changes have come about if you don’t study, like the creation of the empire and the disintegration of the empire...

Following this comment, two classmates followed up suggesting ‘it’s important to have a cultural understanding as well as like an identity to like understand that, like I can call myself British but then so can everybody else here because we all, we all can connect to each other like through....,’ while another student completed the sentiment with the phrase, ‘Shared history’. One student broached the idea of a modern multicultural Britain more directly, pointing to immigration and how, despite recent eastern European immigration, most immigration came from former colonies in ‘Pakistan and India... and then also from like uh the Caribbean’. Here what comes through clearly, is that students were able to highlight both the positive and more complicating negatives of Britain’s imperial history on the physical and mental makeup of modern-day Britain. This also links to the ideas of Grever, Pelzer and Haydn (2011, 226) noted above, who call for a ‘school history curriculum which connects with the interests and concerns of young people’.

#### ***4.6.6.2 Helping to Understand British Foreign Policy***

Although prompts were given for “British society” and “foreign policy” when students failed to respond on more than a very basic level, the theme of foreign policy did elicit more in depth responses from the students, particularly at Site 3, where this was the focus of virtually all student responses to these questions. This might indicate that students were more generally able to draw links to the issue of foreign affairs than to domestic ones when it came to the modern-day resonance of the British Empire.

One student at S1G1 suggested that learning about British imperial history helps one to understand Britain’s relationship with other countries today, but there was little expansion on this. While at S1G2 a student pointed to ‘Afghanistan and Iraq, I personally think is pointless but obviously there’s all these treaties that stretch back.... We’ve obviously got this truce with America... that’s due to, partly due to them helping us in WW2’ with another adding: ‘it does give you a good idea to why certain interventions happen and you know, you look at causes, whether to do with economics or international relations, so I think that that’s something that’s helped through studying imperialism’.

At Site 2, again both groups came up with some examples. At S2G1, most of the responses focused on foreign policy, with one pointing to ‘how we [Britain] invade countries still...’ and how this echoes with the empire ‘cos we were trying to interfere there too’. Similarly, another student suggested that, ‘America and England are kind

of...they're like the most powerful in the world really and...could link on to how powerful we were when we had an empire, so this could be a result of this'. At S2G2 one student felt it might be more relevant than the world wars, as imperial history was 'British-specific history whereas um the world wars had more of an effect I'd say on France and Germany...'. Another suggested that 'we still sort of get involved with like foreign aid and stuff like [aid to] Sierra Leone just now... because they were a previous Commonwealth country'.

Finally, at Site 3, in S3G1 one student noted 'that there are countries in the world that still wish to join the Commonwealth: '[nations that] weren't part of the empire apply to be associated with Britain'. One student at S3G2 touched on foreign policy a little more indirectly: 'it might seem slightly odd to people of our generation, but there are still people out there who believe in the great British Empire and the power of it and the principles behind it. So it's interesting to get a look into the eyes, I think of the idea of the kind of philosophy that involves conquering and controlling'.

Overall, although there was more uniformity across sites when it came to the impact of imperialism on foreign relations, all three sites did give some attention to both the domestic and foreign policy legacies of British imperialism that can still be seen today. Some of these student comments certainly go a long way to justifying the study of British imperialism along the lines set out by Cole (2004), where students can gain an 'empowered awareness' of Britain's present from its imperial past.

#### **4.6.7 Question 9 – Beyond the Classroom**

Question 9 asked students, "Other than in History lessons in school, do you think you have got an impression of the British Empire from anywhere else?". This final question brought together some potential answers to a central (and troublesome) issue: exactly how students come about their ideas of British imperialism. The questionnaires and early focus group questions sought to ascertain whether some of the "History Warriors" were correct in their assumption that in-class learning provides students with their perceptions: an assumption this thesis argues is flawed. This final focus group question thus sought to gauge whether students had a clear idea about where they might pick up ideas from beyond the classroom, without directly asking them to judge whether it was classroom or external factors that played the bigger role. The most frequent suggestions from the students were the media and their families and peers, though there were some



more unpredictable responses that are also interesting to note. Of course, the fact that some students can perceive the impact of subtler influences than simply classroom lessons focused on the topic of the British Empire, also raises the spectre of a far wider spectrum of subliminal influences that many students remain unaware of.

#### **4.6.7.1 Media**

The first response from all Year 12 groups at each site was that a key way of forming views on the British Empire was from films and television. In S1G1, the first respondent suggested films, but when asked if he could give an example, struggled. In S2G1, a student pointed to *Horrible Histories* [a book series/TV series for younger people], television, news, and documentaries. In S3G1, one student pointed to the “History Channel,” and particularly programmes on the First and Second World Wars. This was less the case with the Year 13s, though one student at S3G2 stated vaguely ‘like TV shows and stuff,’ while another pointed to ‘things, sort of contemporary from the period have also come around so older films such as *Zulu* depict it as glorious and things, whereas other films take other perspectives and I think it’s quite important to notice that those have been influenced of the opinions of empire at the time’.

For students at S2G2, the emphasis was on the news media rather than other television programmes or films. For one, simply ‘reading the news... we get concerning foreign countries like would much more often they would focus on like places like India or Pakistan whereas if you read like French newspapers um a lot of the foreign articles are about like Algeria and Morocco because they were former colonies so um the you get like a relevance of um...’. For this student, imperial history helps to explain why we read about the wider world events that we do. For another in this group, it instead led to a common core of news across the former empire: ‘like a royal wedding... like the birth of Prince George, or like when it was the queen’s diamond jubilee and stuff you see kind of how the world celebrates it together, and like you see all the different... like all the colonies and the Commonwealth and stuff they come together and you see it broadcasted everywhere’. For a final student at S2G2, imperial history helped add a sense of pride to news reportage: ‘tension in the Falkland Islands... it’s like it’s part of British history so you still get a sense of our pride in our history – and that’s reported in the news’.

At S3G2, like S2G2, there was also a lot of discussion of news reportage. For one student, ‘there are occasionally throwbacks to empire that are put in there cos

there's like always a media outrage whenever anyone criticises that sort of thing,' a sentiment a number of others agreed with. However, one disagreed, arguing, 'I think [in the news] we do outline the bad things that happened, it's just that we also look at prosperous things that did happen, we probably dumbbed down the stuff, bad stuff that did happen'. This prompted another student to reiterate the idea of positivity in the face of very minor negative coverage: 'extremist groups or whatever, coming up and saying I believe in the British Empire and that – to me anyway – is quite a scary idea,' leading to a response: 'Read a newspaper, like the *Daily Mail* or something'. Interestingly, the two arguing students then came to the telling final exchange: 'it's education, that I think, that prevents people from having that sort of [extremist viewpoint],' said the first, with the second replying, 'And therefore it is important to learn about it'. Here, the focus group atmosphere led to a clearly developing picture, with some depth and an interesting conclusion: that learning about empire helps to prevent extremism and increases the likelihood of a nuanced understanding of British imperialism.

#### **4.6.7.2 Family and Peers**

At S1G1, one student suggested that she got ideas from family members 'because they thought it was important that like I got educated about this stuff before like – if I didn't learn it in school or something, I knew at least like the basics of it'. In S2G1, the lack of response led me to prompt the idea of "other people," leading one student to briefly suggest, 'my grandad maybe,' who they noted had talked about being involved in 'invasions'. However, one of the most in-depth responses on this theme, came more in relation to family background than family members directly. In S3G1, a student who identified themselves as having been raised in Pakistan, suggested that this had been very formative in their understanding of imperialism, but he did not point to his family *per se*, but rather to his schooling outside of the UK. He noted that in the UK, when studying Indian independence, he felt that 'we talk about English sort of centred view of empire' but also that the focus was also on Gandhi and Congress, and that the Muslims in India were presented as 'a side note'. He contrasted this with Pakistan, where he felt the story was 'very Pakistan centred...all we studied was the Muslim view, Gandhi only comes up once in a while when he's done something badly'. He then went on to note that given the number of people in Britain today from 'ex-colonies' there was a great opportunity to 'talk more about it...build upon it'. Another student in that group, suggested that he got stories from his family about ancestors who 'served in India with

the empire' and also in Africa, and he has seen their diaries and correspondence. He then suggested that the other student's and his great-grandparents were in similar places at similar time 'but in completely different roles'. In the Year 13 groups, only one student from all three sites suggested family and peers as a potential source of information, and this was in the form of questions not taken up by the rest of the group: 'I don't know if you like discuss it with your family? Impressions from your friends and family as well?' (S3G2). Here, the significance on family and peers seemed to vary quite substantially, being the focus of a few individuals' responses rather than broader consensus among groups. One reason for this might well be the individual students' own family history or the makeup of their peer group, factors that could certainly be investigated further in the future.

#### **4.6.7.3 Other Factors**

Aside from media and family/peers, there were others who pointed to subtler influences upon them, via literature or physical symbols of imperialism. In S2G1, one student suggested that studying English Literature was a way they had broached the subject of British imperialism outside of History lessons. She noted that her class had discussed ideas of American Independence and rights while studying *To Kill a Mockingbird*. However, there were no other clear examples of students learning about empire in the school curriculum outside of History lessons in any of the other focus groups responses.

The most common example that did not fall into the category of TV/media or family/peers, was that of physical symbols of imperialism. In S1G1, one of the students pointed to buildings and architecture, as giving off an image of empire to this day. He suggested that cities like London, with buildings such as Buckingham Palace, still gave off ideas/imagery of a 'superior kingdom'. In S1G2, another student pointed to 'the monarchy [as]... a symbol of British imperialism... I mean a lot of people are embarrassed by what happened but I'm not...', while another suggested:

...you just see Union Jack everywhere, Big Ben, British things, tea, um, even our food, even our food it's you know, it's everywhere, you just need to go to I think London. I think London is a major hotspot for empire, you go there and you do get a sense of – wow, I'm very British... That to me is imperialism, cos that was a way of Britain's military power, royal power, political power... So, I do think we are trying to preserve that – so Britain does have a heritage and it is something to be proud of. But I think there's a lot more to the empire in everyday life than we let on.

Finally, at S3G2, a student pointed to symbols in the form of events: ‘public events as well, I think that you definitely get the impression that its overwhelmingly positive... the ceremony at the cenotaph every year, we sort of line up all of the you know Commonwealth countries now and we still celebrate the idea of the queen’s Commonwealth...’. Here, in three of the six groups, students felt that they learned about the empire from sites and ceremonies, something which might seem obvious from a detached viewpoint, but what I think is surprising here is that the students were able to register that these sites impacted upon them at all. Perhaps here one could postulate that Cole’s (2004) ‘empowered awareness’ was seeing its fruition. Some of these students who were learning about British imperialism had become attuned to its reflections in the very environments in which they lived or, at least, had visited. If such sights and sounds can have a real impact on young people’s perceptions of British imperialism, it is all the more important that they have an empowered awareness via classroom learning to be able to recognise it.

#### **4.6.8 Overview**

Overall, the student focus group interviews provided a number of clear impressions. Firstly, from asking about the sources within a group context, it was once again possible to see the diversity of interpretations and viewpoints about British imperialism within and across groups and sites – in effect re-enforcing the implications of the questionnaire data. Secondly, when looking at wider questions, beyond the questionnaire sources, it was clear to see that students had a real sense that learning about imperial history was indeed important in the twenty-first century, in both understanding the way Britain is today and its relationship to the world. Finally, the focus group interviews illustrated that several, if not all, students felt that the classroom was far from the only way in which they learned about British imperialism, helping to give some sense of how and why their source-based responses (in both the questionnaire and focus group) varied both among classmates and between different groups/sites.

#### **4.7 Teacher Interviews**

The final type of data collected in this study was that gained through one-on-one interviews with the three teachers who taught the two groups at their respective sites. The questions (see Appendix 5) emerged from the literature and the data collected from

the pilot student questionnaires and focus groups. The three main categories that emerged from combining thematic/theoretical and emergent/data themes for the teacher interview transcripts, as discussed in the methodology section (Chapter 3), were:

- National Identity and Significance
- Mediation
- Curriculum and Balance

The following section has therefore been subdivided into these categories using data gathered in the three teacher interviews. The three teachers are referred to by their aliases (as there are only three): James (Coria FE College, Site 1); Ruth (Coria Comprehensive, Site 2); and David (Coria Independent School, Site 3).

#### **4.7.1 National Identity and Significance**

As the literature discussed in Chapter 2 suggests, one of the key arguments in favour of the significance of British imperialism in History lessons today is that as a subject it is ideally suited to help students to understand why Britain is the multicultural nation that it is today. James led directly with this idea:

Well look at the make up of the classroom[s] you've seen today. We've got Pakistanis, Indians, Sikhs, Muslims... I think the way we've got the classroom, that diversity of the classroom, that diversity of the country now, is largely due to empire and if they're learning about the past and how people come to be here, maybe that can help bring in a bit more tolerance and less racial segregation within wider society... At least an appreciation, an understanding of why we've got the diverse society that we're living in Britain today.

Here, James focused in quickly on the diverse ethnic make-up of his students, then expanded that to the UK as a whole, and how all students would benefit from a better understanding of how and why that society had arisen. David, whose classes were predominantly white British, also felt it would help students to understand 'the make-up of what is British society today and many of the reasons why some of the initial waves of immigration – why they came... why they should and must be integrated,' as well as noting that many international situations pertinent today 'have their roots and their provenance in empire'. So for two of the three interviewees, the first idea raised immediately was that teaching imperial history today was important *because* Britain is a multicultural (and post-imperial) society, and it helps students to better understand the world of today.

Ruth, unlike the other two interviewees, did not point towards multiculturalism to begin with and instead talked of “significance” far more overtly: ‘I think if you’re looking at what is meant by historical significance, and what is meant by that idea, then it’s hard to escape the conclusion that British imperial history is significant’. When reflecting further on this theme, Ruth noted the work of Christine Counsell (Senior Lecturer, University of Cambridge) [and cited on page 24 here], which she believed provides a ‘whole range of things that... would enable you to judge whether something’s significant – on every one of those measures British Empire would definitely be significant, so that would be my measure for whether it’s relevant or not, I think’. Here Ruth’s understanding of my question’s focus on “importance” led straight to “significance,” but rather than focusing in on a particular reason why – at this early stage in the interview – she decided to stress its generic (in her opinion), across-the-board significance.

#### **4.7.2 Mediation**

When it came to the issue of mediation, James pointed to the media and its portrayals of the British Empire – in particular he noted the 2012 BBC documentary “Empire” presented by Jeremy Paxman. James felt that empire was ‘mostly portrayed pejoratively, I don’t think there’s really much opportunity until you do a [school] course to see that there were perhaps beneficial aspects to the British Empire’. He felt that Paxman’s programme was ‘pretty negative, and helped reinforce a lot of negative views on empire’. This in spite of the fact that Paxman (2012) himself decried the portrayal of empire as too often (and unfairly) characterised as a bad thing, and felt he was righting the very wrong James recognises in his book and documentary series.

David also noted the influence of the media, feeling that there was an:

....increasingly set view from, you know, the channel I watch most, the BBC, the newspaper I read, *The Guardian*, but, you know, that sort of, that media establishment where it’s just a word that has – it’s a pejorative term and I don’t think they know why, but they just know it’s knocked about in a pejorative manner and they’re not sort of wise, so they [students] kind of, they just have a vague seepage that it’s a bad thing, but they can never justify it.

Both David and James were united in seeing the media, in both cases the BBC, as generally portraying British imperialism as something broadly negative. In all of the interviews, the teachers felt that an in-depth exploration in History classes would – if

not right this perceived wrong – at least allow students to form more nuanced opinions about British imperialism. However, though both David and James saw documentaries and news media as providing a form of mediation that slanted towards a negative view of imperialism, they differed over the influence of film entertainment. David suggested that, as well as less coverage in schools, there was less – what he termed – ‘media seepage’ regarding empire: ‘... when you’re doing the Anglo-Zulu Wars and you put *Zulu* [the 1964 film] on, you go “my God it’s dated,” you know, and they wouldn’t sit in front of that as a family and watch it on a Sunday afternoon’. However, James felt quite differently, looking straight to films as a source of pre-existing ideas they might bring to class: ‘if there are films like *Gandhi* [1982 film] around which deify him, of course’. David, however, struck upon perhaps the more important question. Where historian Lawrence James (1999, 643) felt, like James (the interviewee) here, that people got their ideas of British imperialism from books and films, perhaps David is correct in suggesting that – when both teachers look to films over thirty years old for their examples – perhaps these are not the go-to media they once were now the days of terrestrial television and “four channels” are well and truly over.

Ruth suggested that the BBC television series *Horrible Histories* (2009-2013) had become far more influential than the original books and ‘have actually done a good job in giving students, um, an alternative, less stereotyped view of the British Empire. So for some students, who’ve watched that, actually their view is probably a bit more rounded than students before them who hadn’t seen those’. However, she felt that ‘in general terms’ television and film still gave a ‘distorted view of empire’. Perhaps Ruth’s example is more telling than the films *Zulu* and *Gandhi*, as it appeals to a far wider market of younger viewers (not primarily those studying British imperial history for A Level).

Moving away from the media, David, although suggesting that pre-A Level schooling led to little development of students’ views of empire, did note that one way in which school might have given students some opinion on the subject was what ‘they’ve learnt from their Pakistani, Indian, whatever, classmates around the school, that actually, you know, there might have been a presentation at school, or something like that, or an understanding of that... but not *too* much’. This idea of peers bringing ideas of British imperialism into the classroom overtly in earlier years is an interesting one and perhaps worthy of further investigation.

James felt that the influence of family opinions on students' views of empire was important, but varied: 'I do think even if white British students aren't getting it from their parents, but certainly the heritage is coming through to kids from Pakistani-British, or Indian-British, or Caribbean-British [backgrounds]...'. As for white British students – as well as non-white students – James felt that there was potential for family influence through the wartime experiences of their parents and grandparents. Ruth felt similarly that family influence was 'diminishingly the case if you're talking about a, an Anglo-centric view of it,' but that the presence of perceptions that come from students whose families perhaps have emigrated from ex-colonies could provide 'a different perspective on the empire, that again can be very useful in lessons'. Indeed, all three teachers seemed to indicate that pre-existing personal views of empire from beyond the classroom were more likely to come via non-white students.

Finally, on this topic, Ruth looked to the influence of politics and politicians in influencing student views, perhaps unsurprising as the interview was conducted in the run-up to the 2015 UK General Election. Ruth said:

I think the current political climate is having an impact, whether directly, or indirectly through their parents and the tabloid press, I think there's a lot of unfortunate, unhistorical nonsense pedalled about the empire that doesn't necessarily determine how students think, but it is perhaps their way into understanding the empire, and that may be beneficial if you can use it, as the springboard for a debate, but equally it can predetermine views that are hard to shift and that may not be consistent with the evidence available... I think that's something History teachers can use, but definitely need to engage with.

Although Ruth pointed specifically to the potential influence of more right-wing, nationalistic parties such as the BNP and UKIP, she also includes the Blair-Brown Labour governments (1997-2010).

#### **4.7.3 Curriculum and Balance**

Ruth felt that students might have gained what she termed 'impressions' of British imperialism at KS3: 'I think that those aspects that they study are valuable in themselves, but at no point do they gain a sense, really, of proper overview'. David's initial thoughts were even more dismissive of the chance to study empire effectively at KS3: 'No – I don't think they do actually,' an observation that he went on to attribute partially to the diminishing time allocated to History in schools, and a focus on 'less



traditional subjects'. None of the teachers interviewed felt that empire was addressed adequately during the compulsory study of History in secondary schools (KS3) – although, it should be noted, an increasing number of UK schools do not have to follow the National Curriculum for History at all. David's independent school had opted voluntarily to follow the prescribed KS3 (pre-2015) curriculum relatively faithfully. However, the rapid growth in the number of academies and free schools during the last and current parliaments has meant that no longer is curriculum freedom the preserve of the relatively small independent sector. Over half of the secondary schools in the UK are now academies, and a growing number are free schools – and these schools are also able to devise their own curriculums for History. So much, one might say, for the grand government scheme to control what students are taught by manipulating the National Curriculum.

David felt that the way British people viewed empire today was quite different from how prior generations would have regarded it: 'we have moved away from the sort of... the British are best generation and actually now they are hypercritical. And actually to understand that we were one of the world's superpowers and we conducted an empire – often exploitative, um, never perfect, but probably, relatively, in a better, more moral, kinder, benevolent manner than the rest, and it's a sense of British identity'. David seemed keen to note that the teaching of imperial history should contain a balance between understanding past wrongs committed and the more benevolent side of British imperialism, but also that this understanding told us something about national identity – almost that the particular way Britain conducted its empire was inextricably linked to national identity.

In the first interview I conducted, for my pilot study (not discussed here), I included a prompt that pointed to an academic article by Barton and McCully (2005, 111) that found a 'balanced and neutral' portrayal of history in Northern Ireland's curriculum had not necessarily led to a lessening of tension between Unionists and Nationalists. Instead the authors found that as students moved through the curriculum their 'identification with Unionist or Nationalist history actually intensifies, and they appear to draw selectively from the school curriculum in order to bolster their developing understanding of partisan historical narratives'. Since this article touched upon the idea that "balanced" and "neutral" approaches to teaching issues, I thought I would retain this prompt when the issue arose in the interviews and repeated this in all three interviews discussed here.

In response to this point, Ruth, from a Northern Irish Catholic background, related a personal tale:

When I started teaching... I was asked by family friends, shortly after I started teaching, because we were doing the Northern Ireland question for GCSE... “But which version do you teach them?” There’s an Irish one and there’s an English one – he didn’t say that but that’s what he meant. And I was so outraged as a History teacher by that question, I, I didn’t know where to start to begin with to answer him, and that whole concept that there is *a* version, that’s not dangerous, that you’ve taken the dynamite out of, (very difficult in Northern Ireland) or there are two opposing versions – as long as you pick the one in the middle it’s ok. That’s not History to me, it absolutely isn’t. And, my reaction to that is it possibly, if that is the case, if they thought they were teaching neutral history, it was probably *bad* history. So no wonder. Because actually what - that word neutrality suggests to me an unwillingness to engage with what the controversial issues are, and really investigate the evidence and arrive at a considered judgement, and if you’re not willing to do that then you just leave people with their original prejudices, I suspect.

Indeed, it was Ruth who responded most powerfully to the ideas of “balance” and “neutrality” throughout our interview – I include this long quotation as it very much sums up a number of other points she made during discussion of the same point. In a similar vein, James reasoned that ‘if you feed to [students] everything that you as the expert can... inevitably people will hang their clothes on a peg somewhere. I think teaching History from a neutral standpoint, they’re still going to take a side, because we’re encouraged in History to look at interpretation and see what we agree with. People like a good debate, people like a good argument’. Both Ruth and James appeared to reach similar conclusions in the end, and these touched on the idea David broached in his comments on “expertise” – which are echoed here by James: that the History teacher’s job is to provide students with sufficient knowledge to form their own opinion of British imperialism, however “positive” or “negative” that might be.

When it came to whether students came away from learning about empire with a particular positive or negative view on empire, the teachers had a number of observations. James suggested that students would reach their own decision based on the facts they have been provided with, but were likely to ‘take a side’. David felt that, if taught well, it could only be ‘a beneficial thing’ and that ‘a deep understanding of it will give people a better view of the UK today and the world they live in.’ However, he warned that if people wanted to pick and choose certain elements ‘it could lead to flash points’. Finally, Ruth argued that it depended on the ‘baggage’ the students brought

with them, and that ‘it will affect the way they view the UK, but whether it leads to a positive or negative effect, I think that – I’d say that’s really hard for me to judge’. She concluded that, ultimately, ‘I’d like to think that by studying the British Empire they have a more nuanced understanding of the United Kingdom’ and that it was not whether students gained a positive or a negative view of empire that really mattered, but that they had gained a ‘deeper understanding.’

#### **4.7.4 Overview**

The teacher interviews provided a very different form of information than either the student questionnaires or the student focus group interviews. However, in many respects the information gathered supported some of the implications of the data gathered in those other formats. The teachers seemed to expect, and desire, students to make up their own minds and form their own opinions, but certainly not to have their perceptions mandated by either the subject matter or classroom teaching – a desire the questionnaire heterogeneity seemed to show was being fulfilled to an extent. The teachers also shared broadly similar views to those of students across the sites in their focus group interviews when it came to the multitude of ways in which forming perceptions about imperial history might occur. Finally, the teachers appeared broadly to share common views on the purpose and significance of teaching imperial history as a topic in English schools in the twenty-first century.

## **5. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

As noted at the start of the previous chapter, the nature of the qualitative data gathered for this investigation called for in-depth discussion and analysis due to the rich nature of the data and to ensure that the student and teacher voices were not lost. In the previous chapter the data is conveyed in detail and divided up into thematic sections for discussion and comparison. This chapter builds upon these previous discussions to pull out the key findings and relate them more directly to the relevant literature set out at the start of the thesis. In order to better integrate and compare the different types of data and to draw their implications together, this section has been divided into two: the first section focuses upon the four sources (in both the questionnaires and focus group interviews), and the second upon the broader questions about the place of imperial history in the twenty-first century classroom (in the student focus group interviews and the teacher interviews).

### **5.1 Source Questions: Questionnaires and Focus Group Interviews (Q1-5)**

In terms of the key research questions addressed in the analysis of this data, the questionnaires aimed to give an indication of how homogenous student perceptions of British imperialism were, either within groups, within sites, or across groups and sites. This would hopefully indicate, at least to some extent, how far content studied and/or teacher mediation of information help to shape student perceptions of British imperialism. If perceptions – as indicated through the student responses to the source material – varied markedly within groups and sites then it might be reasonable to conclude that teacher mediation did not have an overriding impact on perception formation, but instead that other factors predominated (Barton & Levstik 2004, 17-18). If there was little homogeneity within groups, or sites, or across sites, then it would also raise questions about the perceived power of the written curriculum to provide students with a “certain view” of the British Empire, so much the focus of the “History Warriors” discussed in the introduction (Taylor & Guyver, 2012). Indeed, as Harris and Reynolds (2014, 467) suggest ‘little is known about the impact particular content taught in schools, and their associated narratives, have on young people and their understanding of themselves and the society within which they live,’ and this data, when combined with the focus group and teacher interviews, certainly adds to what little understanding there is in this regard.

Overall, the questionnaires and related focus group questions provided some very valuable insights into how individuals within the same groups who had studied the same information about British imperialism at A Level (as well as across different groups) drew different conclusions about what the sources told their twenty-first-century audience about British imperialism. If a teacher might not find such heterogeneity all that remarkable, this helps to show how far the national debate about the written curriculum's power to forge understanding has taken place in a forum devoid of sufficient input from educationalists (Haydn & Harris, 2010, 254-255).

### **5.1.1 Overview of Source Analysis**

The pictorial sources were chosen to be unfamiliar to students, and thus it was less likely they would lean directly upon factual knowledge, but rather resort to broader understanding and perceptions when responding to what the images told them about British imperialism. Overall, it did prove to be the case that the depth and variety of student responses was greater when analysing the pictorial rather than the textual sources – in line with studies such as Harper (2002) and Freedman and Wood (1999) – and in the case of textual sources (as discussed below) there was a greater tendency to paraphrase rather than engage.

When creating a visual breakdown of the student responses of the plain coded responses to Source 1, “Negro Dance” (shown in Graph 1), heterogeneity was not all that evident. However, the subcategories that emerged from that basic coding showed a different picture. As Graph 2 illustrates, when a thematic category was broken down into the message the student was reading, rather than simply the theme that they had raised, the data showed real heterogeneity between student responses. When it came to Source 3, “British Officers,” the heterogeneity was even more marked, and was clear in the basic coding (Graph 4) as well as when one looked in depth at the content/perspective of the student responses.

In the responses to both of the pictorial sources, the theme of “Race” was in the top two of the eight themes in terms of frequency. This casual observation is largely meaningless, as the images were likely to stimulate responses that talked of “Race”, given their visual content. However, what is more important is the fact that studying British imperialism is equally likely, if taken in a broad manner across a variety of geographical locations, to involve discussions of ethnicity and “racial” difference.

These are important themes, and themes that impact significantly on the understanding of young people in the twenty-first century about Britain and its place in the world. As certain commentators discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 note, the study of imperial history can potentially help students form more nuanced perceptions of race (Cole, 2004; Cole & Stuart, 2005). However, of equal note is that many other commentators feel that the classroom might not be the place where ideas/perceptions of race are necessarily formed (Elton-Chacraft, 2009; Rozas & Miller, 2009). The diversity of student responses as shown in Chapter 4 underscores not only the truth behind the notion that students bring ideas about ethnicity with them to the classroom, but also emphasises the importance of students being given a broader perspective in order to further nuance their understanding.

The focus groups, generally, served to support the findings of the questionnaires when it came to the source-based responses, but with slightly less stress on negative opinions. When considering Source 1, the focus group discussions took a slightly less negative tone than the questionnaires overall, with only four out of the six groups giving significant consideration to negative “racial” views. Similarly, when discussing Source 3, the discussion of “Power” was less marked than it had been in the questionnaire responses. Perhaps, what is evident here is that fewer students were likely to take contentious viewpoints in a group (Thomas, 2009), but were more comfortable expressing these in the anonymity of the questionnaire.

The textual sources were selected to contrast with the pictorial sources, but led to a similar degree of heterogeneity in terms of student responses. This was in spite of the fact many students quoted or paraphrased quite considerably when provided with a textual source, and there was certainly less depth of analysis in the responses to the two textual sources. Themes that one would expect to be relatively high in frequency for Source 2 (Churchill’s speech: “Power”, “Pride”, “Christian Civilisation” and “Unity”) and Source 4 (Declaration of Independence: “Oppression” and “Inequality”) did not surprise. Nevertheless, only “Power” for Source 2, and “Oppression” for Source 4, garnered responses from more than half of the students (in total across all sites). Once again, however, even these two themes saw a great heterogeneity in terms of student responses.

More akin to Source 3 than Source 1, the textual sources show some clear diversity in terms of the frequency of thematic responses across the two main themes (as shown in Graphs 3 and 5). Again, like the other sources, both sources elicited very

different readings both within and across groups and sites. Though the sources were selected to be better known than the images, this only served to overtly help a few students to interpret them with greater context, with most students being able to contextualise Source 2 within the Second World War era. In spite of this, students soon divided into those who were overtly critical of Churchill, seeing the speech as cynical propagandising, and those who took the source to be an uplifting message of unity, as well as many stances in between.

### **5.1.2 Discussion of Source-Based Questions**

The primary finding of both the questionnaires and the first five focus group questions is that students were very far indeed from having been inculcated with a unified vision of the British Empire. If the aim of the curriculum in the eyes of politicians and policy makers really is/was to transmit knowledge to help forge a unified identity or understanding (Young, 2011; Beck, 2012; Haydn, 2012), or to direct student subjectivity (Osberg & Biesta, 2008) this does not appear to have been successful with the groups involved in this study. Instead, what appears to be the case is more in line with the findings of Barton and McCully (2005), which identify a tendency of students to draw selectively from what they have learnt to build upon their broader or pre-existing perceptions. Here, the students all had a very similar grounding of in-depth imperial history at AS/A Level, yet drew often quite different conclusions about the nature of British imperialism when confronted with unfamiliar sources. Students raised different themes, and – even more so – gave very different readings of the themes they identified within sources and the positive or negative connotations which they attributed to them.

However, the questionnaires, as Scott and Morrison (2006) note, were better for establishing correlations (or a lack thereof) in the data, rather than the causes of these. In many respects, the focus groups echoed this. Indeed, though the questionnaires and first set of focus group questions appear to reveal a pattern of heterogeneity, they offer little indication as to the cause of this. Though students explained their views, they did not speculate why their views were different from those of other students – and nor were they asked to, as this would have been a very leading question indeed. What evidence there is suggests, however, that the standpoint of the student is important to how they interpret or perceive the British Empire (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008; Edwards,

2014) and that the multiple identities and perceptions of imperialism they bring with them to the classroom play a significant role in the way they chose to use the information they have gained within it (Epstein & Shiller, 2005; Epstein, 2000). As Harris and Reynolds (2014, 467) note, little is known about the particular impact of the content taught in schools, but what the evidence from the source analyses seems to show is that the idea that student gain a unified understanding and identity from studying a specific topic in History appears to lack a real evidential basis.

## **5.2 Beyond the Sources: Student Focus Groups (Questions 6-9) and Teacher Interviews**

The questions in the second half of the focus group interviews, like the questions in the teacher interviews (see Appendix 5), focused more directly on the key research questions of the study itself, which are:

1. Is it important for students in English schools to learn about British imperial history in school in the twenty-first century?
2. To what extent can/do History teachers mediate and thereby alter student perspectives of British imperial history?
3. Are students' views on British imperialism more a product of the classroom or of external, extra-curricular influences?

Where the student questionnaires and first half of the focus group questions allowed more indication of the answers to the second and third questions, the latter half of the focus group questions (and the teacher interviews) centred more upon the first and third questions. A direct question about the extent to which teachers influenced students' views of imperialism would, at the very best, have been leading (see Wellington, 2015, 195). Therefore, questioning students and teachers directly about "importance" and where they felt they/their students got views from beyond the classroom, seemed the more fruitful routes for discussion, allowing them to express themselves freely (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Opie, 2004).

### **5.2.1 Significance**

In terms of significance, students honed in on a number of issues, including:

- Understanding the relation of Britain to the rest of the world/foreign relations, and how other nations view Britain



- Understanding why Britain is ethnically diverse (as relates to former imperial possessions)
- Understanding the nature of modern day Britain (part of national history, heritage)
- To gain a more nuanced understanding of the empire (both positive and negative aspects)
- To help learn from past mistakes

This list matches many of the arguments made in favour of studying imperial history considered in the literature review chapter of this thesis, and speaks to ideas of historical significance more generally (Kitson & Husbands, 2011). Though some students suggested that it is important to learn about the histories of other nations than Britain and its former imperial possessions, there was no overt student voice that suggested that learning about British imperial history was not relevant or important in some way. Just as Jeremy Paxman (2012) pointed to the idea that learning about imperial history explained ‘why Britain has a seat on the UN Security Council and the readiness of British prime ministers to commit British troops to overseas wars,’ so the students across the groups identified numerous instances of how learning about imperial history added depth and context to their understanding of British foreign policy, in a similar manner to some of the students surveyed by Chapman and Facey (2004).

Such sentiments have appeared in the news more recently, when Dr Ghada Karmi (2016), a fellow at Exeter University, suggested that ‘it would be only fitting for 2017 to be the year when Britain acknowledges what its past colonial decisions over Palestine led to and offers a long overdue apology and reparations to the victims of a particularly egregious piece of British colonialism’. Similarly, where Paxman noted the importance of studying the empire to help understand ‘how we [British] think of ourselves’ and ‘post-war immigration,’ so the student focus groups pointed to these factors as well, with one student literally pointing to her classmates. These sorts of student responses were also reflected by the teachers in their interviews. James and David, for example, spoke of the diversity of modern British society and how imperial history helps one to make sense of this, with James pointing to the diversity of his class. Meanwhile Ruth felt that imperial history was significant to the twenty-first century classroom judging by every measure she would use.

When it comes to the latter two points in the bullet-point list above (the idea of nuance, and learning from past mistakes), these ideas speak interestingly to the national debate about the place of imperial history in schools. Some commentators saw the

dangers of teaching imperial history as glamourising or whitewashing history (Milne, 2010; Penny, 2010) and others note that many school curriculums internationally tend to downplay the darker pages of their imperial history (Christou, 2007). More recently, media coverage again focused in on Britain's perceived uneasy relationship with its imperial past and inability to look it in the face. A recent *Guardian* editorial reiterated issues addressed in the introduction to this thesis: that the empire is 'rarely taught in schools' and that 'Public debate rarely gets beyond the clash of jingoism and guilt'. The article's focus was the recent opening of a special exhibition on Germany's colonial past at the German History Museum in Berlin at the end of 2016. The editorial suggests that such an exhibition would be 'impossible to imagine' in Britain because 'it is too difficult and painful' but concludes that, as a nation, Britain needs to set about telling and facing complex and difficult truths about the national past' (Editorial, 2016). However, the student focus groups noted that learning about imperial history had more potential as a solution to this problem than anything else, something that the teacher interviews also reflected. The focus groups certainly felt that studying empire helped them understand Britain today more clearly, and that it could potentially help avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. Similarly, the teachers, when stressing that the good and bad of empire should be taught, suggested that students needed to be aware of the diverse evidence about British imperialism and that this would help them to build their own, nuanced opinions about it.

In addition to the focus groups' suggestions about the positive aspects of learning about imperialism, they also pointed to some potential issues, though it should be noted this accounted for only two students in total. Firstly, one suggested that it was a big chronology, and therefore difficult to study, an issue raised by Gove's February reforms, which would have given much greater time to explore imperial history (see Appendix 1). Another student noted that focusing on imperial history could result in perpetuating an imperialist outlook, akin to "Orientalism" (Said, 1978). The teachers, perhaps more keenly attuned to the idea of curriculum, also pointed to time available to cover content as an issue – feeling that the British Empire was not adequately addressed during the compulsory years of secondary history education (KS3).

### **5.2.2 External Influences and the Role of the Teacher**

In relation to the third key question, again the students discussed a variety of external

influences – or “out-of-school” influences (Voss & Wiley, 1997) – that helped them develop views of the empire outside of the classroom:

- Family and peers
- Newspapers, television news coverage (especially relating to foreign policy, the monarchy or international sporting competitions)
- Television via historical programming and documentaries (and to a lesser extent film)
- Other subjects in school (English Literature)
- Buildings and architecture
- National symbols (monarchy, Union Jack, Big Ben etc.)

Here the students identified a wide variety of influences that they felt either influenced their own perceptions of empire, or they felt might influence that of others. Some pointed to the ideas presented to them by family members or other members of their peer group, in line with commentators such as Epstein and Shiller (2005, 202) or Rozas and Miller (2009, 25); the media (Elton-Chalcraft, 2009); and films (James, 1999, 643) and – in one case – literature. However, there was also a reasonable degree of attention focused upon the built environment and national symbols, which perhaps deserve more prominence in discussions than they have garnered to this point.

In terms of external influences, the teachers indicated a clear awareness of the impact of factors beyond the written curriculum – many echoing the ideas of their students. Indeed, like Grever, Haydn and Ribbens (2008, 78-9) and Rozas and Miller (2009, 25), the teachers and students remarked variously upon the influence of a multitude of potential forms of mediation within and beyond the classroom, from parents and peers to television and prior schooling. Clearly all three teachers acknowledged that classroom teaching of a prescribed curriculum was not the sole, or even necessarily the primary, route by which students came to form their ideas and judgements on British imperial history. This would add support to the idea that, even if the government of the day did seek to indoctrinate students through its authorship of a curriculum, perhaps this would at best have a much-diluted impact – after several tiers of mediation – by the time such prescribed content was received by the students. However, the teacher examples of outside influences were more limited than some of the student groups, with more emphasis on TV and film than on the other factors overall.

In terms of the second question, when it came to the teachers themselves, the three interviewees certainly felt that there was an intrinsic value (and significance) to

studying British imperial history, even if they remained unconvinced that such study needed in anyway to have an active *agenda*. The possibilities of seeking to achieve some sort of agenda are in themselves multifaceted. Some critics of positioning empire centrally in the History curriculum, such as journalists Seumas Milne and Laurie Penny, have focused their criticisms on the potential desire to create ‘pride’ in Britain’s imperial past, and that presenting even a balanced view of British imperialism was akin to presenting a balanced view of the Third Reich (Milne 2010; Penny 2010). The interviewees above would seem to suggest that this was only possible with “bad” teaching. Advocates of “culturally relevant teaching” such as Martell (2013, 81) – though not engaging directly with the issue of British imperial history – suggest, like others cited above, that students ‘of color’ can be ‘empowered by a curriculum that connects to their ethnic backgrounds,’ and British imperial history certainly achieves this for many. However, as Schmeichel (2012, 228) suggests, though culturally relevant teaching has its merits as an idea, it could potentially be a ‘superficial transformation of thinking about culture that sticks children of colour within the same deficit mode of thought in which they were positioned in the 1960s and 1970s’. Further to this, there is the issue that a focus on ethnic/cultural difference might alienate or seem to vilify the “owners” of the “traditional” narrative. The idea of alienating such a group of students is raised by Nayak (1999, 197) who sees “anti-racism” – a key part of much culturally relevant teaching, as having the potential to be viewed by white students and their parents as ‘a bourgeois, *anti-white* practice’. What the interviews and literature explored above all conclude is there is not an easy answer to the question of what the outcomes of teaching imperial history are likely to be. However they also point to the idea that it is nonetheless important for students to address the key issues – many of which relate strongly to the theme of identity – which the study of British imperialism raises.

### **5.2.3 Discussion of the Non-Source-Based Questions**

The students across the six groups covered a broad array of ideas both about the importance of British imperial history in the twenty-first century, and where their ideas might come from – if not solely from lessons that covered the subject. In terms of significance, it has been noted a number of times that this thesis argues British imperial history – if not uniquely – more than most broad subject areas, appears to encompass the vast majority of the core qualities of historical significance, particularly for young

people today (Kitson & Husbands, 2011, 85-86). The students agreed, pointing variously to its utility as a topic in informing their understanding of Britain today, its multicultural society and its relationships with foreign countries – together raising a list similar to that given by Jeremy Paxman (2012), providing the sort of transnational theme lauded by Harris and Reynolds (2014, 484) that would appeal to students who seem to seek contemporary resonance as an important factor of what they are looking for in History (Cercadillo, 2001, 141; Pelzer & Haydn, 2011).

When it came to where students think they might get ideas about British imperialism beyond the classroom, the students outstripped their teachers in the variety which they explored, raising ideas such as symbols and architecture. Indeed, as many commentators suggest, it is what students bring to the classroom that seems here to have as much or more of an impact of their understanding of the subjects they study (Epstein & Shiller, 2005; Epstein, 2000; Littlejohn & Foss, 2008; Edwards, 2014). What the student and teacher responses here also imply, and the questionnaires appear to corroborate, is that this is indeed the case and that both teachers and students – at least those who responded in the interviews – are often aware of this. All of this reemphasises the importance of the students’ standpoint(s), even if they don’t use such philosophical terminology: ‘epistemological form will vary according to the learners’ social location or *standpoint*’ (Edwards, 2014, 172). When Harris and Reynolds (2014, 467) suggested that there was a lack of evidence about the impact of the content taught in schools, and how it impacts on their understandings of themselves and their society/societies, the students’ responses here provide at least a glimpse of an answer.

The teachers interviewed did not agree on everything, but the general sense was that the best way for young people to form a nuanced opinion on British imperialism was not to sanitise and neutralise History, but for teachers to be “experts” conveying a rounded view of the British Empire. As their responses to Barton and McCully’s (2005) study showed, even the best “active” intentions might have unexpected, unintended and even contradictory consequences. If this is the case, perhaps, as the interviewees seemed to sum up, the preferable and achievable aim is that teaching imperial history should enable students to come to better-informed, but still divergent conclusions. Indeed, as the British politician Michael Foot said in 1980, ‘when all other empires fade and vanish, our business is to enlarge the empire of the human mind,’ and perhaps this truly is the only fitting form of imperialism that should be actively presented in a purely positive light in schools (cited in: *Daily Telegraph*, 2010).

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This research project, from the outset, sought to test what appeared to be a widely accepted, but largely anecdotal, relationship between studying the history of the British Empire in schools and a resulting shift in student perceptions. For some this shift in perception might see the flame of empire kept alive in the nation's youth (Parmar, 2010) or create a generation of neoconservatives (Beck, 2012). Similarly, left-wing journalists Seamus Milne (2010) and Laurie Penny (2010) saw the potential to 'whitewash' history and make children 'proud of Britain's imperial past'. Others, like Cole (2004), felt that studying the empire could have the opposite effect, something that critics sometimes begrudgingly conceded, even if this is tucked away in their more sensationalist critiques of the potential pitfalls. For those who focus on the positives of teaching imperial history, the benefits are clear: for Cole (2004, 534), studying the history of the British Empire would help students achieve an 'empowered awareness' of their nation and its past; for Paxman (2012) it might simply help 'understand ourselves a little better,' and for Sir Anthony Seldon it facilitates students in understanding the past from a multitude of different vantage points, as well as from a British perspective (cited in: Penny 2010).

The temptation here is to pick a "side" in this debate, a debate that has rightly been criticised as being one that has taken place – both in Britain and elsewhere – between a very select (even elite) band of politicians and commentators (Taylor & Guyver, 2012), much like the design of the History curriculums themselves (Haydn and Harris, 2010, 254-255). However, there are elements of truth in all points of view. There certainly are dangers in teaching imperial history – or *any* history – if that teaching is uncritical yet, even so, it does not follow that students are passive recipients of either knowledge or understanding. Indeed, as has been shown above, students with similar contextual knowledge and/or teaching often form quite divergent opinions based upon primary sources focused on British imperialism. After all, as advocates of standpoint theory attest: "knowing" is relative to the standpoint of the "knower" (Littlejohn & Foss 2008, 92; Edwards 2014, 169). Based on the findings above, it seems very clear that those who see teaching imperial history as a way of increasing student awareness, adding nuance to their perceptions of twenty-first century Britain and its place in the world, and allowing them a firm foundation on which to build their own ideas, are far better supported in their assumptions by the data collected here.

The questionnaire responses presented and discussed in Chapter 4 and analysed more broadly in Chapter 5, show a variety of perspectives on the British Empire. It is perfectly possible to suggest that such results are simply a reflection of what many classroom practitioners see every day whilst teaching students and assessing their work. However, the grand debate about the power of the curriculum and teachers to shape student understanding seems to assume that students are highly susceptible to what they are told. What their responses here suggest is that there is little evidence – even when taught by the same teacher, the same topic, covering an in-depth exploration of British imperialism – that all, or even most, students draw markedly similar conclusions when presented with unfamiliar sources and asked what these tell them about British imperialism. If it seems unremarkable to school teachers, perhaps, it is worth reiterating that very few of the people involved in the public debate are classroom teachers.

The focus groups, as well as serving to further emphasise the diversity of student views on empire, also helped to touch upon other key questions regarding the place of British imperial history in the classroom. There seems near unanimity among students across sites and groups – sites that were chosen because they were different “sorts” of education providers – that it was indeed important to learn about imperial history. The reasons they raised not only reflected the hopes of those who supported the study of imperial history (Seldon, Paxman and Cole), but might also help to allay the fears of those who saw a potentially dangerous side to it (such as Milne and Penny, but when it came to Gove’s draft curriculum a far wider array of historians as well). The students here saw the study of imperial history as important in helping them understand why Britain is the multicultural nation it is today, as well as understanding its relationship to other countries.

Finally, the teacher interviews showed clear agreement on the importance of British imperial history in twenty-first century secondary education. Although the three teachers certainly did not agree on anything, they did unite around the idea that the best education for students was to convey the empire in a rounded way, and not to try and hammer home an agenda of any sort, however well-meaning it might be. They all appeared to agree that students should be allowed to form their own opinions, and that their job was not to provide the viewpoint, but the skills and contextual knowledge for students to form their own viewpoints, in line, to an extent, with standpoint theory. Echoing the ideas of Cole (2004), perhaps the most important outcome from the

teachers' point of view was to provide their students with an empowered understanding, rather than preconceptions.

### **6.1 Research Questions**

The original research questions that I drew up for this project were at the heart of the design of the pilot study and subsequent modifications to the data collection, and – though it would be impossible to say that such broad questions have been definitively answered – the data collected here does offer useful indications to help further understand the answers. Those original research questions were:

1. Is it important for students in English schools to learn about British imperial history in school in the twenty-first century?
2. To what extent can/do History teachers mediate and thereby alter student perspectives of British imperial history?
3. Are students' views on British imperialism more a product of the classroom or of external, extra-curricular influences?

In regard to the first question, I believe this study has helped to add weight to the idea that it is indeed important for students in English schools to learn about British imperial history in school in the twenty-first century. Both students and teachers made this abundantly clear in their responses: in a society that continues to heatedly discuss issues such as immigration, national identity, values and diversity, to understand the nation's imperial history is to better understand the nation and ourselves today.

An answer to the second question is, inevitably, not as clear cut, but the heterogeneity of student responses in the questionnaires and focus groups, as well as the reflections of the teachers in their interviews, seem to indicate that teachers do not fundamentally determine student perceptions of the British Empire. This finding is broadly in line with studies such as Chapman and Facey (2004) and Barton and McCully (2005), which found that, despite a conscious effort by teachers to provide a balanced portrayal of controversial topics in History, students often continued to form their own perceptions of these topics that might ultimately not be very "balanced" at all.

Finally, and building upon the answer to the second question, the overall view presented in this thesis is that students' perceptions of British imperialism are indeed more a product of their cumulative experiences and standpoints, than of the specific content covered in the classroom. Exactly which influences have the biggest impact are



not clear, and might well provide the basis for future research projects on this topic. However, student responses to the source materials in the questionnaire and their answers to more direct questions in the focus group interviews, suggest that out-of-school learning plays a more substantial role than much of the political/media debate admits (Voss & Wiley, 1997, 148-149; Epstein & Shiller, 2005, 201).

Although the research for this thesis began in 2011-12, while Michael Gove was beginning his attempt to radically rewrite the History curriculum for England, the issue of Britain's relationship with its imperial history has not disappeared. Recently, Burjor Avari (2016), a visiting history research fellow at Manchester Metropolitan University, responded to a *Guardian* editorial's critique of Britain's failure to engage with its imperial past. He argued that it was 'vital for historians and teachers of history not to shy away from researching and teaching about the violence of both the official colonial state and numerous British people towards colonial subjects over nearly four centuries. This is particularly necessary if our young people are not to be seduced into the euphoria of national glorification in post-Brexit Britain'. Here, encapsulated in this short quotation, the debate continues. 2016's European Union referendum and 2017's terrorist attacks in London and Manchester have, in very different ways, revealed deep divisions within the United Kingdom itself when it comes to issues such as "identity" and "race". A message that comes through clearly in this study is that learning about imperial History in schools is an excellent way to help young people gain a broad, nuanced and resonant context in which to understand the problems that modern Britain faces.

## **6.2 Limitations**

As with any research project, this dissertation tells only part of what I believe to be a significant story about the importance of imperial history in the twenty-first century classroom. The limitations of the research outlined in the validity section of Chapter 3, details most of these. However, it is important to recognise the limitations of the study, especially in reflecting upon its conclusions and considering where this research might lead in the future.

This study was conducted on a relatively small scale, which was partially due to the difficulty of finding enough comparable schools studying British imperial history for A Level, and partly to keep the amount of data manageable for a project of this size.

This, naturally, limits its trustworthiness to some extent. In addition, in order to attain anonymity, the study was not able to take into account to any great extent the role of student and teacher socio-economic or ethnic background and identity. For me, not only would this prove to stretch the research project too far for a short thesis such as this, but it would also mean that student anonymity would be very clearly compromised and create a number of additional barriers and complications to overcome. Nevertheless, such information and analysis would have made the findings more comprehensive and potentially more interesting.

Selecting Sixth Form students, rather than those most directly in the firing line of the National Curriculum debate (Key Stage 3) has its own limitations, though as noted above the number of schools that are no longer governed by the English National Curriculum continues to grow. As Chapman and Facey (2004, 37) note, some sociologists would argue that by the time students reach AS/A Level, they ‘certainly know their own minds’. Yet, as the authors go on to note, their study of Sixth Form thinking across different groups studying different topics/themes, did find that noticeable differences in broader perceptions emerged. It is certainly important to recognise that perhaps the students who were the subject of this study were potentially less impressionable, and had more time to spend analysing the subject in greater depth than their younger peers, when it comes to drawing conclusions about the extent to which in-class teaching altered their perceptions of British imperialism.

In terms of the questionnaires, in retrospect the images gave much richer and more varied responses, and were I to repeat a similar study, I believe that I would opt to use only pictorial sources. As Chapman (2011, 31) notes, it is impossible to know which questions/tasks I should have asked/set that might have elicited better responses, but inevitably this is a question every researcher asks oneself. On reflection, although the focus group questions that focused on the sources were useful to compare and contrast with the questionnaire data, they did limit the amount of time spent discussing the other research questions, which might have been more valuable.

Finally, there is the element of the researcher’s role to acknowledge. Though a number of measures were taken to assure minimal researcher contamination/bias (as outlined in Chapter 3), and to subject the collected data to neutral and consistent scrutiny, the interpretative and qualitative nature of the data and the way it was analysed mean that it would be impossible to say all of the implications drawn are entirely unimpeachable. Overall, however, I was pleased with the results gathered here, and

hope that the limitations of the study are outweighed by the benefits of having conducted it.

### **6.3 Implications for Practice**

This thesis does not provide definitive answers, and its interpretive, qualitative approach to exploring the nature of how students come to understand British imperialism in the twenty-first century accepted this from the start. However, among its findings are a clear sense that both students and teachers appreciate the value of studying the history of the British Empire, that students do not appear to adhere to a teacher-driven ideological understanding of British imperialism, and that how they form their opinions is something far more complex than can be summed up simply by curriculums and classroom learning. As noted above, this might not sound all that surprising to a teacher, yet it seems as if these messages are not being heard loudly enough in the broader national debate.

British imperial history touches upon so many controversial issues – such as race or identity – that are often evoked in education debates. Not unlike citizenship education, which touches upon often similar issues, such teaching places extra demands on the teacher and presents challenges especially in places with divided societies (McCully, 2006, 51). Nevertheless, what this study shows is that teaching British imperial history is not only deemed of importance by various historians, educationalists and media commentators, but also by the students and teachers who study the subject in depth. Students and teachers across the sites studied here were united in seeing the variety of ways in which imperial history not only helps one understand the nature of Britain’s relationships with other countries, but also provides invaluable context for young people about the nature of cosmopolitan, multicultural Britain today. Far from being left to coverage by discrete lessons on “citizenship,” where these are taught by schools that are tied to the English National Curriculum, the evidence presented here underscores the importance of historical study in helping students to become better equipped to understand modern Britain and play the role of critical and informed citizens.<sup>22</sup> Following the terrorist attack in Manchester in May 2017, the *TES* ran a piece calling for the History curriculum to ‘educate young people on the historical and present significance of diversity in British society,’ in order to help complement existing and

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<sup>22</sup> Citizenship has been a statutory part of the National Curriculum for England since 2002.

contentious government strategies such as Prevent (Devon, 2017).<sup>23</sup> Now, more than ever, additional time needs to be given over in the curriculum to studying topics that could serve to better educate our young people on the diverse roots of British society. It is hoped that this thesis will encourage teachers in English schools to opt to give greater focus to imperial history (beyond the statutory minimum for those who are still governed by the English National Curriculum) in the light of the findings above. Its findings will hopefully lessen any concerns about potential indoctrination and provide more practitioner-based evidence that the subject is one that is ever more relevant and resonant today.

In addition to encouraging teachers to opt for imperial history – be this increased focus at KS3 and 4, or by opting for imperial history modules at A Level – I hope this thesis will also speak to the policymakers, allowing them to glean from a clear, practice-based piece of research, that the continued – and perhaps increased – presence of imperial history in English schools is less a question of ideological indoctrination and more a fundamental part of the practice of History as a discipline – to allow one the ability to contextualise the past and thereby indirectly or directly help one understand the present more clearly and fully. Further to this, there are ramifications from the same line of argument for the wider applicability of British imperial history not just in History classrooms, but across the wider curriculum.

During the course of preparing this thesis, not only did the direction of public discussion about reforming the History curriculum develop and evolve substantially, but so did nascent proposals from the then Conservative-led coalition government in Westminster regarding the promotion of fundamental British values (FBV) in schools. Two documents were drawn up, one in November 2013 pertaining to independent schools, free schools and academies, and another in November 2014 for (state) maintained schools (see DfE, 2013c; DfE, 2014). In the former, a number of elements link to the broader contextual and critical citizenship aspects of learning about imperial history noted here, perhaps most of all Standard 5(1)(a)(v): ‘assist pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions,’ which can be ‘examined from a historical and a contemporary perspective’ (DfE, 2013c, 6). This is echoed in the maintained schools document with the words: ‘schools should... further tolerance and

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<sup>23</sup> Prevent is a UK government counter-terrorism strategy.

harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling students to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures' (DfE, 2014a, 5).

Evidently, there is potential to see the wider applicability of the benefits of studying British imperial history to create a more enlightened citizenship beyond the History curriculum, and in line with the government's FBV agenda. British imperial history, as a subject, could be used to explore the long view of not only modern British history, but of its politics and the nature of modern-day citizenship more broadly. Lord Nash, then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools, outlined the aims of the FBV guidelines very much along such lines: 'A key part of our plan for education is to ensure children become valuable and fully rounded members of society who treat others with respect and tolerance, regardless of background' (DfE, 2014b). It does not seem too much of a stretch to link Lord Nash's words with those of many of the commentators noted in this thesis, such as Mike Cole (2004) and Anthony Seldon (see Penny, 2010), in seeing that British imperial history has the potential to serve a far broader purpose than simply being a list of dry facts that would instead 'impart a tub-thumping English nationalism' (Evans, 2013b).

#### **6.4 Avenues for Future Research**

There are a number of avenues that this thesis has not fully explored and therefore offer fertile ground for further research. Firstly, there is the matter of the standpoint(s) of the teacher and the student. Though this thesis argues that the varied standpoints are important in explaining the heterogeneity of student responses to the sources and/or student and staff perceptions of imperialism more generally, it would be useful to know whether this heterogeneity is more or less prevalent when students or teachers are broken down into separate groups based on gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic background, for example. In addition to this, though this thesis suggests in-school learning might not be as significant as out-of-school learning, further research is needed to ascertain the extent to which this is true and which of these out-of-school influences are the most significant.

As touched upon above, there is also potential for running a similar study with a younger age group to see whether the age of the students makes a significant difference to either the source or non-source based responses when compared with those of the Sixth Formers studied here. Finally, it would be fascinating to conduct a similar study in

a nation (beyond the United Kingdom) that was formerly part of the British Empire to see how different/similar perceptions of British imperial history, and its place in the History classroom, are in other places. The place of imperial history in the classroom is part of a debate that still has to be settled, but hopefully this thesis goes some way to bringing a discussion that has taken place largely outside of the classroom back into it.

## **7. APPENDICES**

*Reproduced documents from secondary sources:*

**Appendix 1** Extract from “History,” in The National Curriculum in England: Framework document for consultation, February 2013 (DfE 2013a)

**Appendix 2** Extract from “History,” in The National Curriculum in England: Framework document, July 2013 (DfE 2013b)

*Documents and lists created and used in this research project:*

**Appendix 3** Student consent form and questionnaire (provided to students)

**Appendix 4** Focus group questions (for interviewer)

**Appendix 5** Teacher consent form and guiding questions (provided to teachers)

**Appendix 6** Coding guidance for questionnaires

**Appendix 7** Example of coding for questionnaire data

## **Appendix 1**

### **The National Curriculum in England: Framework document for consultation, February 2013. Extract from “History” (DfE 2013a):**

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#### **Key Stage 3**

Building on the study of the chronology of the history of Britain in Key Stage 2, teaching of the periods specified below should ensure that pupils understand and use historical concepts in increasingly sophisticated ways to make connections, draw contrasts, analyse trends, frame historically-valid questions and create their own structured accounts. They should develop an awareness and understanding of the role and use of different types of sources, as well as their strengths, weaknesses and reliability. They should also examine cultural, economic, military, political, religious and social aspects and be given the opportunity to study local history. The teaching of the content should be approached as a combination of overview and in-depth studies. Pupils should be taught about:

#### **The development of the modern nation**

- Britain and her Empire, including:
  - Wolfe and the conquest of Canada
  - Clive of India
  - competition with France and the Jacobite rebellion
  - the American Revolution
- the Enlightenment in England, including Francis Bacon, John Locke, Christopher Wren, Isaac Newton, the Royal Society, Adam Smith and the impact of European thinkers
- the struggle for power in Europe, including:
  - the French Revolution and the Rights of Man
  - the Napoleonic Wars, Nelson, Wellington and Pitt
  - the Congress of Vienna
- the struggle for power in Britain, including:
  - the Six Acts and Peterloo through to Catholic Emancipation
  - the slave trade and the abolition of slavery, the role of Olaudah Equiano and free slaves
  - the Great Reform Act and the Chartists
- the High Victorian era, including:
  - Gladstone and Disraeli
  - the Second and Third Reform Acts
  - the battle for Home Rule



- Chamberlain and Salisbury
- the development of a modern economy, including:
  - iron, coal and steam
  - the growth of the railways
  - great innovators such as Watt, Stephenson and Brunel
  - the abolition of the Corn Laws
  - the growth and industrialisation of cities
  - the Factory Acts
  - the Great Exhibition and global trade
  - social conditions
  - the Tolpuddle Martyrs and the birth of trade unionism
- Britain's global impact in the 19th century, including:
  - war in the Crimea and the Eastern Question
  - gunboat diplomacy and the growth of Empire
  - the Indian Mutiny and the Great Game
  - the scramble for Africa
  - the Boer Wars
- Britain's social and cultural development during the Victorian era, including:
  - the changing role of women, including figures such as Florence Nightingale, Mary Seacole, George Eliot and Annie Besant
  - the impact of mass literacy and the Elementary Education Act.

### **The twentieth century**

- Britain transformed, including:
  - the Rowntree Report and the birth of the modern welfare state
  - 'Peers versus the People'
  - Home Rule for Ireland
  - the suffragette movement and women's emancipation
- the First World War, including:
  - causes such as colonial rivalry, naval expansion and European alliances
  - key events
  - conscription
  - trench warfare
  - Lloyd George's coalition
  - the Russian Revolution
  - The Armistice
  - the peace of Versailles
- the 1920s and 1930s, including:
  - the first Labour Government
  - universal suffrage
  - the Great Depression
  - the abdication of Edward VIII and constitutional crisis

- the Second World War, including:
  - causes such as appeasement, the failure of the League of Nations and the rise of the Dictators
  - the global reach of the war – from Arctic Convoys to the Pacific Campaign
  - the roles of Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin
  - Nazi atrocities in occupied Europe and the unique evil of the Holocaust
- Britain's retreat from Empire, including:
  - independence for India and the Wind of Change in Africa
  - the independence generation – Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, Kenyatta, Nkrumah
- the Cold War and the impact of Communism on Europe
- the Attlee Government and the growth of the welfare state
- the Windrush generation, wider new Commonwealth immigration, and the arrival of East African Asians
- society and social reform, including the abolition of capital punishment, the legalisation of abortion and homosexuality, and the Race Relations Act
- economic change and crisis, the end of the post-war consensus, and governments up to and including the election of Margaret Thatcher
- Britain's relations with Europe, the Commonwealth, and the wider world
- the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

## **Appendix 2**

### **The National Curriculum in England: Framework document, July 2013. Extract from “History” (DfE 2013b):**

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#### **Key stage 3**

Pupils should extend and deepen their chronologically secure knowledge and understanding of British, local and world history, so that it provides a well-informed context for wider learning. Pupils should identify significant events, make connections, draw contrasts, and analyse trends within periods and over long arcs of time. They should use historical terms and concepts in increasingly sophisticated ways. They should pursue historically valid enquiries including some they have framed themselves, and create relevant, structured and evidentially supported accounts in response. They should understand how different types of historical sources are used rigorously to make historical claims and discern how and why contrasting arguments and interpretations of the past have been constructed.

In planning to ensure the progression described above through teaching the British, local and world history outlined below, teachers should combine overview and depth studies to help pupils understand both the long arc of development and the complexity of specific aspects of the content.

Pupils should be taught about:

- the development of Church, state and society in Medieval Britain 1066-1509
  - This could include:
    - the Norman Conquest
    - Christendom, the importance of religion and the Crusades
    - the struggle between Church and crown
    - Magna Carta and the emergence of Parliament
    - the English campaigns to conquer Wales and Scotland up to 1314
    - society, economy and culture e.g. feudalism, religion in daily life (parishes, monasteries, abbeys), farming, trade and towns (especially the wool trade), art, architecture and literature
    - the Black Death and its social and economic impact
    - the Peasants’ Revolt

- the Hundred Years War
- the Wars of the Roses; Henry VII and attempts to restore stability
- the development of Church, state and society in Britain 1509-1745
 

This could include:

  - Renaissance and Reformation in Europe
  - the English Reformation and Counter Reformation (Henry VIII to Mary I)
  - the Elizabethan religious settlement and conflict with Catholics (including Scotland, Spain and Ireland)
  - the first colony in America and first contact with India
  - the causes and events of the civil wars throughout Britain
  - the Interregnum (including Cromwell in Ireland)
  - the Restoration, 'Glorious Revolution' and power of Parliament
  - the Act of Union of 1707, the Hanoverian succession and the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745
  - society, economy and culture across the period: e.g. work and leisure in town and country, religion and superstition in daily life, theatre, art, music and literature
- ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain, 1745-1901
 

This could include:

  - the Enlightenment in Europe and Britain, with links back to 17th Century thinkers and scientists and the founding of the Royal Society
  - Britain's transatlantic slave trade: its effects and its eventual abolition
  - the Seven Years War and The American War of Independence
  - the French Revolutionary wars
  - Britain as the first industrial nation – the impact on society
  - party politics, extension of the franchise and social reform
  - the development of the British Empire with a depth study (e.g. of India)
  - Ireland and Home Rule
  - Darwin's 'On The Origin of Species'
- challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to the present day
 

In addition to studying the Holocaust, this could include:

  - women's suffrage
  - the First World War and the Peace Settlement
  - the inter-war years: the Great Depression and the rise of dictators
  - the Second World War and the wartime leadership of Winston Churchill
  - the creation of the Welfare State
  - Indian independence and end of Empire
  - social, cultural and technological change in post-war British society

- Britain's place in the world since 1945
- a local history study
  - a depth study linked to one of the British areas of study listed above
  - a study over time, testing how far sites in their locality reflect aspects of national history (some sites may predate 1066)
  - a study of an aspect or site in local history dating from a period before 1066
- the study of an aspect or theme in British history that consolidates and extends pupils' chronological knowledge from before 1066

For example:

- the changing nature of political power in Britain, traced through selective case studies from the Iron Age to the present
- Britain's changing landscape from the Iron Age to the present
- a study of an aspect of social history, such as the impact through time of the migration of people to, from and within the British Isles
- a study in depth into a significant turning point e.g. the Neolithic Revolution
- at least one study of a significant society or issue in world history and its interconnections with other world developments

For example:

- Mughal India 1526-1857; China's Qing dynasty 1644-1911; Changing Russian empires c.1800-1989; USA in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **Appendix 3** *[NB: Resized slightly from the original due to margin changes]*

#### **Participant Consent Form**

##### **Title of Research Project**

How Britannia Ruled the Waves: Teaching the History of the British Empire in the Twenty-First Century

##### **Author of Study**

Adam Burns (University of Leicester) – as part of a research project for the completion of a Doctorate in Education at the University of Leicester

##### **Purpose of Research**

This project seeks to fill a gap in current debates and discussions that have up until now been largely theoretical in nature. The ultimate aims of this study are to bring to light areas of concern/interest, to provide starting points for future investigations and, potentially, to directly inform the way in which any future History syllabus is formed in regard to teaching the history of the British Empire. The hope is that this study will help improve the way educators understand how students learn about British imperial History.

The **key questions** this study seeks to address are as follows:

- Is it important for students in English schools to learn about British imperial history in school in the twenty-first century?
- To what extent can/do History teachers mediate and thereby alter student perspectives of British imperial history?
- Are students' views on British imperialism more a product of the classroom or of external, extra-curricular influences?

##### **Your Privacy**

For my research project, I would like to collect certain information from you in two ways:

1. Asking you to complete an **anonymous questionnaire** (you do not fill in your name or identity on the questionnaire and your identity will not be stored anywhere)
2. Asking you to take part in a **small group interview** along with some of you classmates (the interview will be recorded, but the recording will be kept safely in my possession). When I write up information from the interviews, there will be **no record of your name or identity** in my notes or in the final project.

**Your name will not appear** anywhere in the final research project outcomes.

If you change your mind about taking part in either the questionnaire or the group interview, you have the right to withdraw consent to partake in the project at any time.

If you understand all of the above information and are willing to help me with my research project please turn over the page and complete the form:

Name:

School:

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Please check the following boxes and then sign and date the form at the bottom in the spaces provided:

- ☐ I am happy to take part in the project outlined on this consent form entitled:  
How Britannia Ruled the Waves: Teaching the History of the British Empire in the  
Twenty-First Century
- ☐ I am happy to complete a questionnaire and for the results to be used in the above  
research project and I am aware my name will not be used in the final research  
project.
- ☐ I am happy to take part in a group interview along with others in my class, which  
will be recorded on tape.
- ☐ I am aware that, although the conversation will be recorded, my identity will be  
kept anonymous in any research data that is produced.

I understand the purpose of this research project and give my consent for any information I  
provide in either a questionnaire or in a group interview to be used for the purposes of this  
research project and any resulting publication of its findings, and that my identity will remain  
anonymous.

Signed: .....

Date: .....

## Teaching Imperial History – Student Questionnaire

What follows are four historical sources which are followed by questions relating to the British Empire. Please respond to each question in the space provided and spend roughly 3-4 minutes on each response.

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### Question One



**Fig 1.** *Bridgens, Richard. "Negro Dance" (1836)*

[© The British Library Board, 789.g.13 Plate 22]

**Consider the picture above. What does this source tell us about the nature of the British Empire?**

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## Question Two

**Read the following extract from a speech given by Prime Minister Winston Churchill after the surrender of France to Germany in June 1940:**

*What General Weygand has called the Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilisation. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire. The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be freed and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands.*

*But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new dark age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves, that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, This was their finest hour.*

**Consider the extract above. What does this source tell us about the nature of the British Empire?**

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### Question Three



**Fig. 2:** *Burke, John. "Group British officers (Q.O.) Guides" (1878)*

[© The British Library Board, PHOTO487 (44)]

**Consider the picture above. What does this source tell us about the nature of the British Empire?**

This image shows a full page of a handwriting practice worksheet. It consists of multiple sets of three horizontal dotted lines, providing a guide for letter height and placement. The lines are evenly spaced across the entire page, leaving ample room for writing practice. There is no text or other markings on the page.

## Question Four

Read the following extract from the 1776 United States Declaration of Independence:

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*

*That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.*

**Consider the extract above. What does this source tell us about the nature of the British Empire?**

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Fig. 1: Bridgens, Richard. "Negro Dance" Lithograph (1836) – Reproduced from the British Library  
<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/carviews/n/022zzz000789g13u00022il0.html> [Accessed 12 October 2013]

Fig. 2: Burke, John. "Group British officers (Q.O.) Guides." Photographic print (1878) – Reproduced from the British Library  
<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/g/019pho000000487u00044000.html>

## **Appendix 4**

### **Focus Group Guiding Questions**

#### **Source 1**

1. Do you think this picture is a good example of what the British Empire was like?
2. Do you think that it tells us anything about the role of race in the British Empire?

#### **Source 2**

3. Do you think this picture is a good example of what the British Empire was like?
4. Do you think *this* source tells us anything about the role of race in the British Empire?

#### **Sources 3 and 4**

5. Which of these do you think gives us the best example of what the British Empire was like in reality?

#### **Non-source focused questions**

6. Do you think that it is important for us to learn about Britain's imperial history, and (if so, or if not) why?
7. Do you think that studying British imperial history is relevant?
8. Does it tell us anything about Britain today? (Prompts: British society, British foreign policy)?
9. Other than in History lessons in school, do you think you have got an impression of the British Empire from anywhere else?\*

## **Appendix 5**

### **Participant Consent Form**

#### **Title of Research Project**

How Britannia Ruled the Waves: Teaching the History of the British Empire in the Twenty-First Century

#### **Author of Study**

Adam Burns (University of Leicester) – as part of a research project for the completion of a Doctorate in Education at the University of Leicester

#### **Purpose of Research**

I am a part-time student/ full-time teacher undertaking research for a Doctorate in Education exploring how British schools teach the history of the British Empire. The hope is that this study will both help improve the way educators understand how students learn about British imperial history, and bring to light potential reforms for consideration by those involved in creating future school History curricula.

The key questions this study seeks to address are as follows:

- Is it important for students in English schools to learn about British imperial history at school in the twenty-first century?
- To what extent can/do History teachers mediate and thereby alter student perspectives of British imperial history?
- Are students' views on British imperialism more a product of the classroom or of external, extra-curricular influences?

#### **Declaration of consent**

I am happy to take part in the project: "How Britannia Ruled the Waves: Teaching the History of the British Empire in the Twenty-First Century". I give my consent for any information gathered in this interview to be used in this research project and any resultant academic output.

**Name:** .....

**Signed:** .....

**Date:** .....

### **Guiding questions for the interview**

1. Do you feel that it important for students in English schools to learn about British imperial history at school in the twenty-first century, and why?
2. By the time students study History at A Level, do you think students have already formed clear opinions of British imperialism?
3. Other than at school, how do you think students form views on the history of the British Empire?
4. Do History teachers have an obligation to provide a ‘balanced’ view of British imperialism, and how might this be achieved?
5. Is it possible during a student’s school career – from Key Stage 1 through to post-16 (A Level) education – to gain a real understanding of the British Empire, given that it forms only a fraction of the curriculum?
6. Do you feel that a better knowledge and understanding of British imperialism has a generally positive or negative effect on how students view the United Kingdom today?

## **Appendix 6**

This list was used to guide coding of the data, though it is important to note that there was inevitably an element of subjectivity in my reading of the students' responses:

### **1. Pride**

All relevant derivatives of "pride" and phrases that pertain to being proud in how they are used by the student. Also includes references to: passion, nationalism, inspiration and heroism.

### **2. Inequality**

All relevant derivatives of "inequality" and phrases that pertain to being unequal in how they are used by the student. Also includes references to: less important, hierarchy, inferiority/superiority, disrespect, elitism, exclusiveness, arrogance, patriarchy and class.

### **3. Uniting Force**

All relevant derivatives of "unity" and phrases that pertain to being united in how they are used by the student. Also includes references to: shared values and co-operation

### **4. Christian Civilisation**

All relevant derivatives of "Christian civilisation" and phrases that pertain to such an idea in the sense they are used by the student. Also includes references to: other religions in comparison to Christianity, and "civilising" more generally.

### **5. Happiness and Freedom**

All relevant derivatives of "happiness" or "freedom" and phrases that pertain to these in the sense they are used by the student. Also includes references to: fairness, not being oppressive, non-interference, positive views of equal treatment and benevolence.

### **6. Oppression**

All relevant derivatives of "oppression" or phrases that pertain to being oppressed in the sense they are used by the student. Also includes references to: unhappiness as a result of treatment, unfairness, injustice, slavery, harshness, provoking fear, neglect, use of force to coerce, unfair restrictions, domination and exploitation.

### **7. Power and Strength (other than incidental discussion of soldiers)**

All relevant derivatives of "power" or "strength" or phrases that pertain to these ideas in the sense they are used by the student. Also includes references to: military might,

authority, military violence, warfare (unless simply mentioning WW2 in the case of Source 2), conquest, police (v) and aggression.

#### 8. Race

All relevant derivatives of “race” or “ethnicity” or phrases that pertain to these ideas in the sense they are used by the student. Also includes references to: indigenous culture, native culture, negro (other than simply restating the title of Source 1), racial interaction, racial separation/segregation, and the mentioning of non-source related ethnicities and nationalities that are primarily non-white for the sake of comparison.



## Appendix 7

### Example of coding for questionnaire data

#### S1K Coding 1

A: Pride

B: Christian Civilisation

C: Inequality

D: Uniting Force

#### Q1

The black people in this image seem to be making music and look as though they are having fun. It looks as though they have formed their own form of entertainment. There are no white people to be seen in this image which could suggest they were kept separately [sic] or left them alone even. The term 'negro' isn't a particularly respectful word so could show they weren't treated with an awful lot of respect and when looking at the dates, they most probably [sic] were not.

Comment [MOU1]: Regarded as inferior

#### Q2

I think this source shows that the British had a lot of responsibility or at least they felt they did. It is quite positive in a sense as they saw failing as not an option because of the consequences it would have. It speaks of the survival of Christian civilisation which shows this was the most popular religion in Britain at this time.

#### Q3

The British officers are very smartly dressed which could be a puposful [sic] decision to make the British Empire look professional [sic] and smart, just like the officers in this picture. I think the British Empire relied an awful lot on their image as a whole and saw that as the most important thing. If they looked strong, then they were strong. The men also look very weathy [sic] as their uniform is quite grand looking so this shows that the British Empire had money.

#### Q4

[All scribbled out] This makes the British Empire seem as though they know better than others and are quite ignorant to the ways in which other governments rule because it goes against this extract. The Americans believed that

Comment [MOU2]: Tyranny

The nature of the British Empire is that they thought what

## SIK – Coding 2

A: Happiness and Freedom

B: Oppression

C: Power and Strength

D: Race

Q1

The black people in this image seem to be making music and look as though they are having fun. It looks as though they have formed their own form of entertainment. There are no white people to be seen in this image which could suggest they were kept separately [sic] or left them alone even. The term 'negro' isn't a particularly respectful word so could show they weren't treated with an awful lot of respect and when looking at the dates, they most properly [sic] were not.

Comment [MOU1]: Hedging

Comment [MOU2]: Separation

Comment [MOU3]: Negative difference

Q2

I think this source shows that the British had a lot of responsibility or at least they felt they did. It is quite positive in a sense as they saw failing as not an option because of the consequences it would have. It speaks of the survival of Christian civilisation which shows this was the most popular religion in Britain at this time.

Q3

The British officers are very smartly dressed which could be a puposful [sic] decision to make the British Empire look professional [sic] and smart, just like the officers in this picture. I think the British Empire relied an awful lot on their image as a whole and saw that as the most important thing. If they looked strong, then they were strong. The men also look very weathy [sic] as their uniform is quite grand looking so this shows that the British Empire had money.

Comment [MOU4]: Project image of strength

Q4

[All scribbled out] This makes the British Empire seem as though they know better than others and are quite ignorant to the ways in which other governments rule because it goes against this extract. The Americans believed that

The nature of the British Empire is that they thought what

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