Modern Economic and Social History

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An Affluent Society?

Britain's Post-War 'Golden Age' Revisited

Whilst the study of Britain's post-war history is a well-trodden path, and the paradox of absolute growth versus relative decline, much debated, it is here approached in a fresh and rewarding way. Rather than highlighting economic and industrial 'decline' the volume emphasizes the tremendous impact of rising affluence and consumption on British society. It explores various expressions of affluence: new consumer goods; shifting social and cultural values; changes in popular expectations of policy; shifting political behaviour; changing attitudes of politicians towards the electorate; and the representation of affluence in popular culture and advertising.

By focusing on the widespread cultural consequences of increasing levels of consumerism, emphasizing growth over decline and recognizing rising standards of living enjoyed by most Britons, a new and intriguing window is opened on the complexities of this "golden age". Confounding growing consumer expectations and demands against the anxieties of politicians and economists, this book offers all students of the period a new perspective from which to view post-imperial Britain and to question many conventional historical assumptions.

Cover illustration: Lawrence Harvey as Joe Lampton in the film version of John Braine's Room at the Top, produced by John and James Woolf and directed by Jack Clayton. ©2008 London Features International Ltd.
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CHAPTER 12

Losing The Peace: Germany, Japan, America and the Shaping of British National Identity in the Age of Affluence

Richard Weight

"That blasted Common Market", Lord Beaverbrook told Harold Macmillan in 1962, "is an American device to put us alongside Germany. As our power was broken and lost by two world wars, it is very hard on us now to be asked to align ourselves with those villains." Beaverbrook's dislike of European integration, and of West Germany in particular, was shared by most Britons in the high period of affluence between 1950 and 1970. However, resentment of American influence was almost entirely a preoccupation of the nation's elites. The British people viewed affluence and the Americanizing effect it had on their culture more enthusiastically and this constituted a key division between rulers and ruled. Yet, in the long run, it was Americanization that brought the British closer to Germany and Japan, because, whatever their views of each other, they were all transformed by it.

Germany

By the end of the Second World War, the British political establishment had learnt the lessons of Versailles. Coupled with the need to counter Soviet power in Europe, this created a consensus for nurturing German democracy through financial aid to the Western Zone rather than undermining it with financial penalties. John Maynard Keynes was a leading advocate of the policy. Even the arch Germanophobe, Lord Vansittart, who had previously damned Keynes as an appeaser, found himself in agreement over reconstruction with his former contemporary at Eton, writing 'we must provide Germany with a regulated prosperity, so ordered as not again to land her and us in war, but to give her opportunity for the joint boons of freedom and prosperity.'

The British people were not so minded. According to a Gallup survey in September, 1944, 90 per cent wanted their soon-to-be defeated enemy to pay reparations for war damage, and two-thirds wanted the Ruhr and Rhineland to be turned into an international zone to help do so. Most thought that German men should be drafted en masse to help repair physical destruction to town and country with their own hands (the retention of thousands of prisoners-of-war until 1948 and their use as slave labour in Britain partly satisfied that desire). There was also unanimous support for permanent disarmament and 56 per cent wanted the country
The Wirtschaftswunder ("economic miracle") that got under way in the early 1950s was observed with alarm in Britain as its share of world markets fell as sharply as that of the Federal Republic rose. Industrialists and civil servants were in no doubt that the German character, and not simply American aid, was responsible. The car industry became a particular source of concern after West German vehicle exports overtook those of Britain in 1956. Contesting the idea that German cars were better quality, the beleaguered executives of Rootes claimed that the company was failing to sell to motorists in the FDR because of "the intensity of German Nationalism which has been drummed into them over the past seventy years, and particularly by Dr. Goebbels, that they must buy German, and this they are certainly doing." In May 1956, a working party of Treasury officials reported that Germany's success "cannot be explained, as could to some extent the expansion which occurred before 1953, by the low level from which she started ... If this country fails to meet the German export challenge, it could fall into second place behind Germany as the leading export country in Europe, with all that implies."

Two months later, as the Suez Crisis was beginning to rumble, Chancellor of the Exchequer Harold Macmillan was even blunter:

"The government's position is very bad at present. Nothing has gone well. In the M. Bas we are still teased by Nasser and Co; the Colonial Empire is breaking up ... At home taxation is very high; the inflation has not been mastered ... Meanwhile, we see Germany — free of debt, and making little contribution to defence — seizing the trade of the world from under our noses."
is a very good side to these people. It is our job to see that Dr. Jekyll remains in possession. 15

But admiration soon gave way to jealousy. Instead of trying to learn from the Germans, the British mocked them, inventing a series of wartime stereotypes to explain their competitor’s success and justify their own failures. Industrial growth, the British convinced themselves, was only a step away from military aggression; demanding bosses were simply ‘Little Hitlers’; time and motion studies and productivity targets merely a shop floor version of the methods used in concentration camps. Hence, the ‘stop-go’ nature of the UK economy was not a symptom of competent mismanagement but of Britain’s democratic spirit; muddling through was a testament to the democratic national character that had saved civilization. It did not go unnoticed that the term Wirtschaftswunder had originally been coined in the 1930s to describe the economic success of the Third Reich (as a result of which, the architect of the Federal Republic’s success, Finance Minister Ludwig Erhard, did not like it to be used). 16

The link between wartime nationalism and post-war productivity contained other contradictions. As women’s presence in the workplace increased, the comics, films, memoirs, memorials and toys through which the British glorified their ‘great war’ became more gendered. Like the Western Romanesque of white America, they celebrated the pioneering, martial spirit of the male. In doing so, they fitted for a more domesticated generation of men who felt emasculated by the female independence that affluence created and upon which the feminist movement built its foundations. War culture, excluding as it did the contribution to victory made by over three million ‘coloured’ British subjects, also comforted those who were threatened by the challenge to conventional narratives of nationhood posed by black immigration and civil rights movements. However, like Westema, there were crossover points that united the sexes, at least, around a national legend.

A prime example is Britain’s most popular situation comedy Dad’s Army (BBC, 1968–77). Enjoyed by men and women, its success rested on its ability to poke fun at class and generational divisions while reasserting the existence of a common culture based on a clearly defined national character. The 1971 film version of the series begins by juxtaposing German invasion plans with the Home Guard’s defences. The Germans have a large HQ and elaborate charts, while Captain Mainwaring makes do with the village hall and an AA road map. The German general states that three panzer divisions are ready to spearhead the attack; Mainwaring explains that the platoon must defend the promenade from the Novelty Rock Emporium to Stone’s Amusement Park. The German general says divisional commanders will communicate with him via short-wave radio; Mainwaring says he will give orders by Boy Scout rumble. Finally, a German sergeant tells his commanding officer that Hitler wishes to see the invasion plans; Godfrey, meanwhile, arrives to tell Mainwaring his wife wants him to bring home a pound of sprouts. 17

Released in the middle of acute industrial unrest, the film not only appealed to those longing for social unity. More specifically, its celebration of muddling through in the face of German might appealed to those keen to justify the UK’s failure economically to capitalize on military victory. Therefore, the potency of British mythologies of the Second World War sprang as much from a sense of failure as from a sense of triumph. Yet, claiming a moral victory was also problematic because British decadence had its limits too. The West German system of Marktwirtschaft (social free enterprise) managed to spread affluence while maintaining a better welfare state than that of the UK (even the National Health Service – that great benchmark of British liberalism – was less effective than its German counterpart). 18 As a consequence, West German labour relations were better than the UK’s. 19 Film and TV drama dealing with British labour relations sometimes harked Teutonic myths. An example is the Bryan Forbes/Richard Attenborough feature The Angry Silence (1960), described by critic Alexander Walker as “an attack on union abuses that up to then had never been so scathingly stated in a British film”. 20 Set in an engineering factory, its owner, Mr. Martin, appeals to union activists to consider German industrial superiority and asks them to consider whether, as a result of their wildcat strikes, Britain has really won the last war. Few films actually explored life in West Germany. Cold War spy thrillers – from Bond to the more intelligent ‘Harry Palmer’ features like Funeral in Berlin (1966) – displayed a grim world of Checkpoint Charlie, Communist officers barely distinguishable from the Nazis who staffed mainstream war films, ruling over an East German people imprisoned in a world where consumer choice meant having or not having a Trabant.

Despite their achievements, the Germans were not, as the British liked to imagine them, an arrogant people. Asked by pollsters in 1951 ‘When in this century have Germans had it best?’ only 2 per cent of them answered ‘today’. By 1959, the number had risen to 42 per cent and by 1970 to 51 per cent, a figure that held up over the next decade. Yet, when asked if they felt pride in being German, in 1971 only 42 per cent replied ‘yes’ and by 1981 it had fallen to 35 per cent, while around 40 per cent of young people eligible for national service classified their army as ‘potential murderers’. On being elected the Federal Republic’s third President, in 1969, Gustav Heinemann was asked whether he loved his country. ‘I love my wife’, he replied. 21

Unrepentant Nazis did play a prominent part in the reconstruction of West and (to a lesser extent) East Germany. 22 There was a more overt surge of far right activity in the 1960s largely, as in Britain, targeting immigration – in Germany’s case from Turkey. But the revival peaked electorally in 1968 (a decade before it did in England) when the National Democratic Party [NPD] won 9.8 per cent of the vote in the Land election in Baden-Württemberg. 23 German conservatives had learnt not to flirt with fascism, and the process of coming to terms with the nation’s past was so extensive that the Germans even invented a word to describe it: Vergangenheitsbewältigung. The other reason why the Federal Republic did not produce a racist demagogue like Enoch Powell with mass cross-party appeal, still less another fascist dictator like Hitler, was that affluence mollified discontent with capitalism as an economic system. More positively, it offered an urgently needed alternative definition of what being German meant. German national identity, such as it was in the tortured era of partition and war guilt, was based on a quasi-
satisfaction in economic recovery, particularly in the Federal Republic where growth was most spectacular. The Germans were still swayed by national fictions. In cinema, *Heimatlinie* (home films) like *Green Is the Heather* (1955), which presented a sentimental vision of domestic life in rural Germany, were as popular during the 1950s as war films were in the UK. Before the more cosmopolitan works of the New German Cinema led by Rainer Fassbinder garnered critical attention in the 1960s, *Heimatlinie* provided an alternative to Erhard's technocratic identity. But they were not a direct reaction to it, stemming as they did from a pastoral ideal that stretched back as far as the eighteenth century. And in the end, trade statistics proved the depth of Wirtschaftswunder mattered more to West Germans – more even than the restoration of *Deutschland Uber Alles* as the national anthem in 1952 or Adenauer’s triumphant visit to Moscow in 1955 during which he secured the release of German prisoners of war still held by the Soviet Union.

The reverse was true of the British. They became increasingly discontented with their standard of living, especially in comparison to West Germany’s, while at the same time remaining intensely proud of being British, primarily as a consequence of their victory over the Third Reich. Even during the high period of UK growth, between 1955 and 1965, when the standard of living doubled, affluence did not shape British national identity in the way that it did in West Germany. As Prime Minister, Macmillan gave growth a patriotic catch-phrase that still defines the era for Britons who remember it: just as Erhard defined it for his people with the words ‘today’s luxuries are tomorrow’s utilities’. But most of our people have never had it so good did not resonate in the UK to the same extent.

Partly, this was because economic growth was geographically less evenly spread in the UK. Whereas in the FDR, citizens from Hamburg to Munich enjoyed similar levels of prosperity, in Britain the main beneficiaries were those living in the south and midlands of England. The decline of heavy industry in Scotland, Wales and the north of England meant that standards of living rose more slowly there, a trend that underpinned the rise of Scottish and Welsh nationalism in the post-war era. Consequently, affluence was a less reliable, even dangerous, way of defining Britishness. Macmillan himself recognized this, as a result of which the speeches he made in Scotland and Wales concentrated on the potential of their unique national characters to effect economic recovery and share in England’s prosperity.

But whether Britons were enjoying the full fruits of growth or lamenting the fact that they were not, they perceived its historical development in a quite different way to the Germans. For the British as a whole, affluence was seen as a just and necessary reward for the sacrifices they had made to defeat the Nazis. Both as a social reality and as an ideological construct, affluence was a direct continuation of victory in war and not, as in Germany, a way of escaping the memory of the Third Reich and the catastrophe it had led to.

This explains why, at precisely the moment when Britain was enjoying unprecedented prosperity, victory over Germany became embedded in national culture. It also helps to explain why that legend remained so central to Britiishness into the 1970s and beyond when growth turned to ‘stagflation’. Concern that Britain was losing the peace – whether through trade union militancy or the snobbery of ‘the Establishment’, depending on your political outlook – underpinned the notion of moral superiority over the Germans that both Left and Right indulged in at one time or another. Theories about the British economy being hampered by cultural ‘tropes are dubious in any context. But if they should carry any weight here, it was not the pastoral, paternalistic strain of Englishness that generated ‘gentlemanly capitalists’. Rather, it was the xenophobic and honorific legacy of VE Day that prevented British management and workers alike learning economic lessons from post-war Germany.

Japan

Another former enemy, Japan, was also seizing the trade of the world from under the British nose and, indeed, from the Americans who had so heavily subsidized its reconstruction. Although the Japanese economic miracle did not begin until the premiership of Koizumi (1956–64), it was even more spectacular than that of West Germany. In the decade to 1970, the country enjoyed an annual growth rate of 13.2 per cent, and it survived the oil crisis that hit Britain so badly (Japanese exports grew from $19.3 billion in 1970 to $174 billion in 1985, a rise of 800 per cent). Having not carried out systematic genocide, the Japanese were less burdened with war guilt than the Germans. In 1975, their Prime Ministers began annual visits to the Yasukuni shrine to the war dead and from 1982 school textbooks unashamedly glorified over the most militaristic part of the Showa era. However, unlike the Germans, the Japanese developed a quintessential identity that was based primarily on affluence. Hayato and his successors encouraged their people to see television sets, fridges and washing machines as the ‘three sacred treasures of the household.’ This was a deliberate play on the ‘sacred treasures’ of mirror, sword and jewel that traditionally symbolized the God-like authority of the Japanese Emperors. The fact that in 1946 Hirohito had been forced by the United States to renounce his divinity, added further symbolic weight to the transfer of national identity from militarism to affluence that the catch phrase denoted.

The centrality of affluence to Japanese identity was demonstrated when the new constitutional monarchy had its first full day in 1959 at the wedding of Hirohito’s son, Crown Prince Akihito. Like the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953, it was the first major royal event to be televised, and like that of Britain’s Queen, it stimulated demand for TV sets. But whereas in the UK, technology was primarily seen to be the conduit for a display of immutable national tradition, Akihito’s wedding was about technology and its role in fostering national pride through prosperity. Akihito’s bride, Michiko Shoda, was the daughter of a wealthy businessman, and what the press dubbed the ‘Misty boom’ refereed to much of the mass purchase of consumer goods in the years immediately after the wedding as it did to the modernization of the Japanese monarchy.

The novelist Kenzaburo Oe summed up these trends: ‘There were’, he writes, ‘a series of movements to create a new sense of identity and impose it on the Japanese people … not exactly going back to the pre-war period, but getting them to sing the national anthem, respect the flag and think of the Emperor as part of a [Image 0x-0 to 842x595]
AN AFFLUENT SOCIETY

The Germans were also thought to be a more cruel people than the Japanese. In a Gallup survey of 1967, the Germans were most commonly defined as 'hard-working' (35 per cent), 'practical' (15), 'intelligent' (13), 'arrogant' and 'progressive' (12 per cent each). The Japanese were described as 'hard-working' (30 per cent), 'progressive' (18) but also 'cruel' (13), 'warlike' (11) and 'courageous' (10). Even in films as David Lean's Oscar-winning Bridge On The River Kwai (1957), which was implicitly critical of the British officer class, the enemy are portrayed as brutal authoritarians with little or no human compassion. It was the most popular British film for two years running, in 1958 and 1959, and remains a Christmas TV favourite. The Men From Camp Z, a series in the Victor comic, based one story on that of Kwai in 1964. In it, a camp full of starving, exhausted prisoners of war working on a fictional railway in 'the Jap-infested Thailand jungle' break out and capture with the assistance of Australian commandos. 'Spectro Spectro!' cry the guards, kicking and riffling the prisoners. 'Spectro spectro, yourself yellow dragon!' replies one, producing a knife to slit the throat of his tormentor. 'Nice work, lad. Now let's get the Nips outside!' says another, before they set off to destroy the bridge they have slaved to build for the Japanese. Germans on the other hand, are sometimes seen to possess gentlemanly traits. The camp Kommandant in escape dramas like The Colditz Story (1955) are a prime example. Removed from the front line (because, we are encouraged to believe, they are not committed Nazis) they observe the

But the nuances of post-war Japanese identity were as lost on the British people as those of West Germany.

Public dislike of the Japanese, and the national stereotypes it perpetuated, often mirrored that of the Germans. Indeed, 'Japophobia', if we may call it that, was at times even greater than Germanophobia. This was because Japan's successful invasion of South East Asia had humiliated the British Empire and, arguably, hastened its collapse more than Hitler's invasion of continental Europe had done. Consequently, those aggrieved by decolonization felt an especial animus towards them, one exacerbated by shame that such humiliation should have been visited on the British by a non-European colonial power. Japophobia therefore had racial overtones. For all the German's crimes against humanity, they were still regarded as racial rivals who were troubled with some serious character flaws. The Japanese, on the other hand, were portrayed (especially in boy's comics) as buck-toothed little yellow men with a speech defect - a physiognomic caricature that is not cultural impact to the caricatures once employed by the British to demean the black people over whom they ruled.

Despite public awareness of the Holocaust, the Japanese were also thought to be a more cruel people than the Germans. A Gallup survey of 1967, the Germans were most commonly defined as 'hard-working' (35 per cent), 'practical' (15), 'intelligent' (13), 'arrogant' and 'progressive' (12 per cent each). The Japanese were described as 'hard-working' (30 per cent), 'progressive' (18) but also 'cruel' (13), 'warlike' (11) and 'courageous' (10). Even in films as David Lean's Oscar-winning Bridge On The River Kwai (1957), which was implicitly critical of the British officer class, the enemy are portrayed as brutal authoritarians with little or no human compassion. It was the most popular British film for two years running, in 1958 and 1959, and remains a Christmas TV favourite. The Men From Camp Z, a series in the Victor comic, based one story on that of Kwai in 1964. In it, a camp full of starving, exhausted prisoners of war working on a fictional railway in 'the Jap-infested Thailand jungle' break out and capture with the assistance of Australian commandos. 'Specko, Speck! cry the guards, kicking and riffling the prisoners. 'Specko, specko, yourself yellow dragon!' replies one, producing a knife to slit the throat of his tormentor. 'Nice work, lad. Now let's get the Nips outside!' says another, before they set off to destroy the bridge they have slaved to build for the Japanese. Germans on the other hand, are sometimes seen to possess gentlemanly traits. The camp Kommandant in escape dramas like The Colditz Story (1955) are a prime example. Removed from the front line (because, we are encouraged to believe, they are not committed Nazis) they observe the

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Geneva Convention and are shown to be fair, for all their stiff-necked Prussian humourlessness.

The Germans are also seen to observe social hierarchies more intently than the Japanese, treating British officers with respect commensurate with their superior breeding and education. In Bridge On The River Kwai, the conflict between Colonel Saito (Sessue Hayakawa) and Colonel Nicholson ( Alec Guinness) begins when the latter refuses to allow his officers to perform manual labour on the bridge. Instead, he offers to make sure the troops do the job with proper concern for the tradition of British craftsmanship so that the structure will last. He then activates a peace-time hierarchy ranging from architects and engineers to carpenters and labourers that corresponds to their military ranks. Saito's attempt to (symbolically at least) blur class boundaries in order to inspire more efficient 'team' working practices may be read, even in this perverse context, as a metaphor for the mass production techniques that the Japanese borrowed from the Americans and then honed after the war. It is doubly symbolic that the bridge of which Nicholson is so proud is destroyed by a Commando task force led by an American, played by William Holden (not, as in the Victor's version by an Australian, because the film's producers needed Hollywood financing and so could not afford to downgrade the US contribution to victory in World War Two).

Despite absenting himself and his fellow officers from back-breaking work that will assist the Japanese war machine, Nicholson unites his men through a very particular appeal to patriotism. The triumphal construction of the bridge on his terms, may be seen as a re-assertion of the value, not just of class distinctions (a common theme in 1950s war films), but also of the methods of production on which the British industrial revolution was erroneously thought to have been based. Whatever the case, Saito's approach was echoed in Japanese corporate management techniques. When, during the 1980s, the custom of managers and workers working together in the morning was exported to Britain by the car manufacturer Nissan and adopted by many of the 200 Japanese companies operating there, it was ridiculed as a foreign idea which the slovenly, bolshy British worker and his snobbish, uptight boss would reject (correctly, as it turned out, since few non-Japanese companies followed suit).

It is worth noting briefly that the only narrative of the war in which the Japanese were seen to possess attributes that correspond to those of the British was the legend of the Kamikaze. Their suicidal devotion to Japan struck many on the British, not only because fanaticism is fascinating, but also because they reminded them of 'The Few'. An elite corps of pilots, the red-beardened Samurai of the air may have killed hundreds of sailors when they plunged into Allied battleships; yet they were seen to have waged war more cleanly, and more bravely, than those who tortured soldiers in the jungles of southeast Asia. However, this is an exception that proves the rule about the way Japan was screened by Anglo-American filmmakers.

The notorious Japanese treatment of British prisoners of war gave credence to the generally uncompromising portrayal of them in mid-century popular culture and explains its acceptance by the British public. It also explains why the campaign for an apology and compensation by veterans of the conflict in the Far East
continued long after the idea of obtaining redress from Germany had ceased to be an issue. State visits to and from Japan were not resumed until the 1970s, and then only because the British economy was in such a dire condition that national sentiment was divided in favour of trade agreements, a process that culminated with firms like Nissan being induced by desperate governments, and even more desperate unions, to set up shop in Development Areas. Emperor Hirohito made his first post-war visit to Britain in 1971, a full 13 years after the first German state visit, by President Heuss, in 1958, and the Queen did not go to Japan until 1974, nine years after her first trip to Germany. Although Heuss got a cool reception, his visit did not garner the hostility of Hirohito’s, during which there were noisy demonstrations and colourful articles in the press re-running every aspect of Japan’s war record. This was partly, of course, because Hirohito had been Emperor during the war and was therefore a direct link with the militaristic regime against which Britain fought, in a way that Heuss (an opponent of Nazism) was not. But it was also because the treatment of PWs in the Far East impressed more on British lives than the Holocaust. Perhaps the most telling comparison lies in the British reaction to the dropping of atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945. They were greeted with shock and awe, but there was no more public opposition to the American’s action than there had been to Bomber Command’s destruction of German cities, most agreeing with the Daily Mirror’s verdict that the ‘yellow peril’ had at last vanquished. ‘VI Day’ (15 August) was almost as rapturously celebrated as VE Day had been and when, a year later, the Cabinet, the British Legion and the Churches considered how best to commemorate the 1939-45 war, the anniversary of victory in Japan was as serious a contender as that of the Battle of Britain.

The 1964 Tokyo Olympics (postponed from 1940) confirmed Japan’s rebirth, according to many at the time, including Yoshimori Sakai. A 19-year-old athlete born in Hiroshima on the day of its destruction, Sakai lit the Olympic flame before joining a Japanese squad that came fourth in the medals table after the United States, Soviet Union and West Germany. The event barely impinged on the British consciousness. Despite growing awareness of the full after effects of nuclear fission thanks to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, most Britons continued to regard what happened at Nagasaki and Hiroshima as a necessary part of the defeat of foreign tyrants who had started the war in the first place.

Of course, this did not stop the British consuming Japanese goods on a huge scale. Cheap but reliable cars, motorcycles, television sets, radios and a host of smaller gadgets all bore the imprint of a small group of islands that in the space of a generation became and (despite China’s adventuring in state capitalism) remains the only country to challenge the West’s economic hegemony. Youth culture was recognized by its critics and champions alike as a product of affluence in the 1950s and 60s. Yet, by the 1970s, the machines on which young Britons played their Anglo-American pop music were usually made in the Far-East. This culminated with the UK’s biggest electronics retailer, Dixons, naming its own brand Matsui, in the correct belief that in order to sell their products they would have to pretend to be Japanese. The video recorder – invented in 1955 by Noriharu Sawasaka of the Toshiba Corporation – even changed British leisure patterns after its launch as a consumer product in 1981, undermining both cinema and television by giving people more choice of what they watched and when they watched it.

The difference between the impact on Britishness of German and Japanese economic success is this: although Japanese affluence was built partly on its skill in undermining key areas of British manufacturing, it did not generate the same sense of having lost the peace to a defeated enemy. The legends of the Second World War on which the increasingly fragile British identity was based, were almost entirely located in the war against Germany, particularly that fought on the Home Front between 1940 and 1941. In contrast, the United States’ war, from Pearl Harbor to Okinawa, was primarily located in its conflict with the nation that had attacked without warning on 7 December 1941. Moreover, under the regime of General MacArthur between 1945 and 1950, the Americans had taken complete control of the political and economic reconstitution of Japan, moulding it (as they thought) in their own image in a way that even the British had not attempted during their ‘re-education’ programmes in Occupied Germany. Thus, when the Japanese started to threaten American markets, residual anger towards Japan for having dragged the US into war was compounded by bitterness that a pupil had learnt its lesson in liberal capitalist democracy so well that it was now biting the hand which had fed it. In short, although detestation and mockery of the Japanese in the UK strengthened the British idea of themselves as decent, fair-minded people, they continued primarily to define themselves against the Germans.

Europe

The xenophobic fall out from two world wars was compounded by the steady creation of the European Union. The Francophobia that allowed De Gaulle’s vetoes of the British application to the Common Market in 1963 and 1967 was based on the wounded pride of a spurned suitor. What really drove popular hostility to European integration was the fear that it would restore German power in Europe. A message from Lord Montgomery of Alamein appeared in a full-page spread in national newspapers, paid for by Beavenbrook. Warning that membership of the Common Market would mean a German general giving orders to a British one, Monty said “Germany has disturbed the peace of the world twice during the past 48 years, in 1914 and 1940. Are we to put up with all this again? Never.”

Shortly after the death of Winston Churchill in 1965, Elizabeth II became the first British monarch to visit Germany since 1913. Diplomatically, it was a success. In Hanover, the Queen was taken to the state archives where she was shown the letter written in 1714 by Whig grandees to her ancestor, George, Elector of Hanover inviting him to assume the British throne. But the symbolism of eighteen century Protestant unity was lost on an increasingly secular nation. Moreover, the British were simply not ready to forget the War. The Queen’s visit was part of Harold Wilson’s strategy of courting the Federal Republic in order to exert pressure on De Gaulle. But it was a dangerous one and the Labour
Government knew it. On her return, Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart told the Cabinet:

Two world wars and the horrors of Nazism have left such a legacy of bitterness that we cannot be sure Anglo-German reconciliation will last unless we for our part make it do so ... We ought to develop Ministerial contacts, technological collaboration and cultural and youth exchanges ... If we try to encourage the British people to think of contemporary Germany in a more friendly way, all the indications are that the Germans will be happy to come more than half way to meet us and that this, in turn, will be the best possible insurance against a return to savagery. They feel a particular need for reconciliation with the British people and this is an asset which we can turn to good account. Anglo-German friendship is all the more desirable because stability in Germany is a tender growth ... If we reinitialize the Germans they are that much more likely to conclude that striking independent nationalistic stances may be the best way of seeking their objectives.35

A year later, England’s victory in the World Cup Final of 1966 cemented, in England at least, the prevailing view of Germany as an old enemy rather than a new friend. On the day of the final, the Daily Mail declared If Germany beat us at Wembley this afternoon at our national sport, we can always point out to them that we have recently beaten them twice at Wimbledon, a comment that provoked complaints about British militarism from the West Germans. The spontaneous celebrations following the victory were widely compared to VE Day. The Sunday Express concluded:

A blaze of Union Jacks waved, as people unashamedly gripped by emotion and patriotism danced, wept and hugged each other ... What they will tell their grandchildren in years to come is that it was English nerve and English stamina which finally overcame the tenacious resistance of the Germans ... No one who saw this historic World Cup final can deny England’s finest hour.36

The victory came in the middle of the Labour Government’s ultimately unsuccessful attempt to avert a sterling crisis: 40 days after Harold Wilson had condemned striking seamen’s leaders as a tightly knit group of politically motivated men, and 11 days after he had announced a statutory wage freeze. By seeming to pull victory out of the jaws of defeat, the event echoed the way in which Britain had done so during the Second World War and this helped it to become a central part of Anglo-German identity even for those who cared little about football. The narratives of war and deliverance that peppered the reaction to England’s victory not only show the extent to which Germany was the prime ‘other’ by which British national identity was shaped in the twentieth century. They also reveal that we need about the post-war fragility of the UK economy was heightened with resentment of West German affluence. Hence the widely-expressed belief that somehow the result would inspire capital and labour to repeat the victory of Alf Ramsey’s men on trading floors, boardrooms and production lines. Richard Crossman (one of Labour’s leading Eurosceptics) believed that it ‘could be a decisive factor in strengthening sterling.’ It was, he concluded, a tremendous, gallant fight that England won. Our men showed real guts and the bankers, I suspect, will be influenced by this, and the position of the government correspondingly strengthened.37 Lord Harewood, the Chairman of the Football Association and a cousin of the Queen, declared that he had:

raised our prestige throughout the world ... It is indeed one of the few bright spots in the otherwise economic situation which faces the country this summer. We feel sure that many of our export industries will derive a welcome boost from this success. The players who have made it possible worked hard and made many sacrifices. They have set an example of devotion and loyalty to the country which many others would do well to follow.38

Unfortunately, Bobby Moore could not stop the devaluation of sterling in 1967. But long after England’s footballers failed to make the British work harder and strike less, the West German example was paraded in an attempt to do so. Pro-Marketeers also used it to sell membership of the Common Market, arguing that if the British wanted the EEC’s standard of living, they would have to surrender some of their national sovereignty to the European Community. Appealing to material aspirations had the added advantage of distracting voters from the long-term constitutional implications of membership and of smothering the more erroneous claims that national identity would be dissipated by it. This tactic formed the basis of the three government-sponsored campaigns for entry between 1961 and 1972 and for the referendum on membership that took place in 1975. It continued to carry some weight until the German economy began to falter as a result of the cost of reunification in 1990. British cvity of their new European partner was such that from the mid-1970s, German companies began to emphasize their nationality in UK adverts, and they often did so by cleverly playing on British caricatures. The legend of Teutonic efficiency and modernity in engineering reached a bizarre apotheosis in the Audi car company slogan Vorstur durch technik – to which, in TV commercials, the ironic-sarcastic voice of actor Geoffrey Palmer added ‘... as they say in Germany.’ The slogan, which meant ‘progress through technology’, could have been coined by Erhard himself. In fact it was invented by a British advertising agency and was never used on the Continent. Consumers in the UK were encouraged to desire an Audi by admiring the outlook of its makers while laughing at the humourless obsessiveness which supposedly underpinned that outlook. Therefore, after the British had invested wartime stereotypes of the Germans to explain how their enemy had won the war, the Germans bounced those stereotypes back to help secure that victory. A more cruel irony was to come.

America

To the dismay of anti-Marketeers, the United States was in favour of Britain joining a united Europe, believing that it would help to prevent further European
The simultaneous supplanting of Britain as the superpower of the West intensified concern, drawing in those who were otherwise Atlanticists—like Harold Nicolson. Five years after his visit to Germany, he turned his mind to the US, writing that Anti-American feeling was a 'dangerous and quite useless state of mind'.

But, he lamented, “gradually they are outing us out of all world authority. I mind this, as I feel it is humiliating and insidious... they are decent folk in every way but they tread on tradition in a way that hurts.” Since the 1920s, the prime conduits of American culture—Hollywood and the music industry—had been castigated by left and right alike for destroying the British way of life with vulgar frigidity. Commercial television was a major addition to these media in 1955. It led to an expansion of the advertising industry and the associated professions of public relations, market research and polling, all of which helped to stimulate consumption.

The debate surrounding the introduction of ITV revealed the full extent of opposition to Americanization. It also showed how much the wider debate over affluence revolved around the relationship between the individual, society and the state, and how much it was framed in turn by fear of the Soviet Union. Leading Labour Party opposition to ITV in the House of Commons, Herbert Morrison said that it was “totally against the British temperment, the British way of life and the best or even reasonably good British traditions”, and he warned that upon the outcome of the vote depended the “future of our country, the thinking of our people and the standard of culture of the people.”

In reply, the Conservative spokesman, David Gammans, said:

> The critics do not trust their fellow human beings with the freedom of a television knob... One of the worst changes [in recent years] is the way in which governments all over the world are arrogating to themselves the right to decide what their subjects shall read, see, believe and think... perhaps it is as well that we got freedom of the press when we did because there are many people who would put up arguments against it now.

He also reminded opponents that the British were among those in Europe who owed some of their current good fortune to post-war American aid. "Whatever may be said about the Americans... we might sometimes remember that American prosperity is the highest in the world and that it has produced an over-spill which has helped us and a great part of the free world to live.”

Gammans' view was shared by the majority of Britons. Resistance to Americanization, whether it took the form of intellectual dislike or government legislation (such as the limitations imposed on broadcast advertising by the 1954 Television Act) was largely confined to the left-leaning middle classes. That was the case even in the immediate aftermath of the Suez Crisis and at the height of the Vietnam war when American neo-imperialism became more blatant. The 1967 Gallup survey of national stereotypes discovered that the British view of the United States had not deteriorated since Mass Observation studied it in 1945, MO had found that ‘energy, enterprise, generosity and efficiency’ were the characteristics most ascribed to Americans, with ‘boastfulness’ about their success being the main
complaint rather than any intrinsic dislike of their way of life. A generation later, Gallup reported that Americans were most commonly seen to be ‘progressive’ (24 per cent), ‘considerate’ (16), ‘intelligent’, ‘generous’ (15 per cent each) and ‘hard-working’ (14). The public debate on the ‘Brain Drain’ of engineers and scientists to the United States – at its height when a government enquiry reported in 1967 – showed how highly the British regarded the US. The Americans were not blamed for reducing professionals with higher salaries and status; nor were those who left seen as traitors. Instead, people blamed Britain’s less meritocratic society and its weaker economy, whether or not they believed Harold Wilson’s claim that the former was to blame for the latter. ‘Brains on the whole are like hearts’, commented US Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, ‘they go where they are appreciated.’ Oral testimony suggests that the hearts of such migrants remained in Britain and some were disillusioned with what one called the ‘cultural wilderness’ of North America.

Still, the key point about the relationship between affluence and identity is this: the British believed that the individualism they prized as the foundation of their national character, was being amplified by mass consumption and not eroded by it. The negative wartime caricatures of the Germans and Japanese – formalised by post-war resentment of their economic success – remained the paradigms of totalitarian power against which most defined their Britishness. In contrast, the positive view of Americans (for all the envy attached to it) was re-inforced by the United States’ global supremacy. This was partly because the US had been a vital ally in two World Wars. It was partly also because the process of decolonization which the US encouraged and benefited from did not vex ordinary Britons, whose national identity had ceased to be undermined by the Empire since the 1940s. Ultimately, however, the idea that Britain had lost the peace to America gained no currency because the British continued to regard the Americans as a more modern and successful version of themselves.

The attempt by politicians and business leaders to persuade the British to admire and emulate the German economic miracle won the European community some grudging support in the 1970s. But it failed to shake the popular view of America as the model of a more affluent, less class-bound and freer society. Hence the fact that whenever the US enlisted the UK in bomb-bay diplomacy, it was seen by the British as evidence of the ‘special relationship’ that protected their liberties. Meanwhile, every stage of European integration was seen as an attempt by the continent, and Germany in particular, to erode these liberties and erase the national character of an island, even though it was patently becoming more Americanized with every passing generation.

Conclusions

When the magazine Encounter asked leading intellectuals for their opinion on European integration in 1963, the response of W.H. Auden was the most perceptive. He reminded readers that, whatever much the project was ultimately a political and not merely an economic one, whether you were for or against was based on cultural matters that were closely related to social class:

One will never understand the current debate about England joining the Common Market if one thinks of it as merely a clash between different economic interests. Beneath the arguments pro and Con lie passionate prejudices and the eternal feud between the High-Brow and the Low-Brow. Instinctively I am Pro. I know Europe first hand, and as a writer I cannot conceive of my life without the influence of its literature, music and art.

On the other hand America and, to a lesser extent, the Commonwealth, appealed to the Low-Brows:

They are inhabited by their relatives and people like themselves, speaking English, eating English food, wearing English clothes and playing English games, whereas abroad is inhabited by immoral strangers and an Englishman who goes there often still wears, despite to live there, is probably up to no good.

The impact of Continental popular culture on Britain has been underestimated, partly because of xenophobic hostility to European integration, but also because of the tendency to regard the 1970s as the decade in which post-war affluence settled. Yet it was during this time that foreign package holidays first became affordable to the working classes. Cheap foreign travel enhanced individual freedom as much as the purchase of cars in the period that is commonly associated with affluence. Tourism also began an unprecedented peacetime engagement with the rest of Europe, with a commensurate effect on Britishness that urgently requires further research.

Equally, the reach of America can be exaggerated, especially where ‘English games’ were concerned. Football was Britain’s most successful export. For all the old eminence that the sport played it was also a source of affinity between the British, Germans and, eventually, the Japanese; and it was one, moreover, that Americans did not share. Television drove the globalization of football. In 1958, the same year that US investors were given a free hand by the Treasury, the World Cup was comprehensively televised for the first time in Western Europe, and watched by several hundred million people, thanks to their ability to purchase a television set.

Critics also underestimated the extent to which American culture was naturalized after it crossed the Atlantic or the Pacific. British popular music became a forum of national identity in the UK following the ‘Beat’ explosion of the 1960s, while the same occurred in Germany a generation later with ‘Techno’. In Japan, the films of Akira Kurosawa influenced Hollywood directors, the prime example being Seven Samurai (1954), which revised the Western genre that Kurosawa had himself been influenced by. The Disney Corporation was forced to adapt Tokyo Disneyland to domestic conditions following its launch in 1983, 28 years after Disney’s original theme park opened in California. ‘We took the
foreignness out of it', remarked one Japanese professor, 'people in Japan were enjoying not the American dream, but their own Japanese dream.'

But it was still a dream, and in their waking hours, neither East nor West could deny that affluence had been the ' Trojan horse of Americanization. Bernard Harris' The American Take-over of Britain, published in 1968, concluded 'From the moment an English baby is weaned on American-owned baby food, until he is carried away in an American-owned funeral car, he is to that extent American-oriented from cradle to grave.' Ironically, as a consequence the British way of life resembled that of Germany and Japan far more than it had done before the Second World War. For all the profound cultural differences that continued to divide the world's economic powers, to an unprecedented degree they shared a common culture based on that of America - a culture driven by capital, accelerated by information technology and clogged by the English language.

When Sherpa Tensing arrived in the UK after conquering Mount Everest with Edmund Hillary, the press noticed that he wore two wrist watches in case one malfunctioned. This was seen as primitive naivety about Western technology which evidenced Britain's cultural superiority and, for some, justified the continuation of its civilizing mission to the world. When Emperor Hirohito first went to America in 1975, after meeting John Wayne he visited Disneyland and for the rest of his life liked to wear his souvenir Mickey Mouse wrist watch. There is here a symbolic counterpoint between the confidence of late imperial Britain and the realities of post-imperial Britain. In the long age of affluence, it became harder for the UK to claim moral or material superiority over other nations or even, given the cultural impact of the US, to distinguish itself from announcing the surrender of Japan to the United States in 1945, Hirohito said: 'the war is not necessarily progressing to Japan's advantage.'

The peace did not progress entirely to the UK's advantage and, thanks to the hegemony of their biggest ally the British now had more in common with former enemies than it was comfortable for them to admit.

Notes

5. Ibid., p. 150.
7. Ibid., p. 174, diary entry, 7 September (1949).
8. When Bevan launched his attack on German re-armament in 1934, polls found that around 60 per cent were opposed to a Europea Defence Community, 40 per cent of whom believed that the Nazis might return to power. See Watt, D.C.: Britain Looks to


12. Ibid., p. 289.


16. The career of Ludwig Erhard (1897-1977) had been checked as a result of his refusal to join the Nazi Party. Immediately after the war he was appointed Professor of Economics at the University of Munich where he devised the Marktwirtschaft system. His career in politics began in 1949 when he was elected in the Bundestag as a Christian Democrat, joining Adenauer's administration as Finance Minister, in which post he remained until he succeeded Adenauer as Chancellor (1963-66). A trip in the West German economy forced his premature resignation.

I am grateful to Dr Mark Connelly for this insight from his forthcoming study We Can Take It!: Britain and the Memory of the Second World War, Routledge, London, 2004.

17. West Germany spent around 2 per cent more of its GDP on healthcare than the UK and patients endured fewer 'bottlenecks'.

18. In 1969, for example, the number of working days lost to strike action per 1,000 workers was 310 in the UK, compared to only 20 in West Germany and 291 in Japan.


21. This was partly thanks to Hans Globke, Adenauer's State Secretary for the Interior from 1953 to 1963 and his advisor on government appointments, who had previously helped to frame the Nuremberg Laws banning Jews from public life. By 1958, two-thirds of the FDR's Foreign Ministry staff were ex-Nazis, while the CDU, despite exposing Globke, had 75 ex-Nazis in leading government positions. See Kaufman, David: 'The Nazi Legacy: Coming to Terms With the Past', in Janzen, Peter, (ed.): Modern Germany: Politics, Society and Culture, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 125-7.

22. Ibid., pp. 135-3. Despite the rising number of attacks on ethnic minorities by neo-Nazi groups since re-unification, the NPD (formed in 1964) has not yet repeated the successes it had in the late 1960s, polling no more than 5 per cent of the vote.


24. See, for example, Macmillan's speeches in Cartiff on 8 July 1960, in PRO: BD 25/5.


27. Ibid., pp. 82-4.

28. Wybrow, Britain Speaks Out, op. cit., p. 84.
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