



Citation for published version:

Pearce, N, Kenny, M & Aqui, L 2021, "The Empire of England: Enoch Powell, Sovereignty and the Constitution of the Nation", *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 238-260.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwaa022>

DOI:

[10.1093/tcbh/hwaa022](https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwaa022)

Publication date:

2021

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced version of an article accepted for publication in *Twentieth Century British History* following peer review. The version of record Lindsay Aqui, Michael Kenny, Nick Pearce, 'The Empire of England': Enoch Powell, Sovereignty, and the Constitution of the Nation, *Twentieth Century British History*, hwaa022 is available online at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwaa022>

University of Bath

Alternative formats

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:
openaccess@bath.ac.uk

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

‘The Empire of England’ Enoch Powell, sovereignty and the constitution of the nation

The 50th anniversary of Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech, which fell on 20 April 2018, brought back into the public spotlight one of the most controversial figures in modern British political history and showed that the passage of time has not dulled the powerful feelings that helped make him an outcast in the 1970s and 1980s. Powell remains indelibly linked to his positions on race and immigration, and this connection looms large in both the public mind and the bulk of academic literature on his career and thought.¹

In recent years, however, there has been a widening of the lens through which his politics and public arguments are viewed, and a number of recent scholarly contributions have deepened our understanding of his thinking on other issues, including economic policy, the fate of the British Empire, Northern Ireland, and the European question.² An important recent study by historian Paul Corthorn contends that Powell’s ‘diverse political campaigns’ on these issues can be ‘understood coherently as part of a long-running and wide-ranging public debate over the ‘decline’ of the British nation’.³ His book seeks to achieve an impartial and detached perspective on Powell’s life and thought, steering away from some of the polemical and hagiographic literature of the 1960s and 1970s, while drawing on additional archival material

¹ Ben Jackson, ‘Immigration Then and Now’, *Political Quarterly* 89:3 (2018): pp. 349–351. Zig Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Race in Britain* (London, 1984); Paul Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge, 1990); Chris Waters, ‘Dark Strangers’ in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947–1963’, *Journal of British Studies* 36:2 (1997): 207–237; Anne Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality: Britain, 1968–1990* (Cambridge, 1994), chapter 4; Richard Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain, 1940–2000* (Basingstoke, 2002); and Amy Whipple, ‘Revisiting the ‘Rivers of Blood’ Controversy: Letters to Enoch Powell’, *Journal of British Studies* 48:3 (2009): pp. 717–735.

² Peter Brooke, ‘India, Post-Imperialism and the Origins of Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ Speech’, *The Historical Journal* 50:3 (2007): pp. 669–687; Paul Corthorn, ‘Enoch Powell, Ulster Unionism, and the British Nation’, *Journal of British Studies* 51:4 (2012) pp. 967–997; Robert Saunders, *Yes to Europe! The 1975 Referendum and Seventies Britain* (Cambridge, 2018); and Camilla Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge, 2013).

³ Paul Corthorn, *Enoch Powell: Politics and Ideas in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2019), p. 3.

and offering new insights to those supplied by the various biographies published on Powell in the 1990s.⁴

In this article, we aim to contribute to this wider reappraisal of Powell, arguing in particular that some of the central aspects of his thinking were shaped by his highly distinctive reflections on sovereignty, representation and the nation state in the early 1950s. We consider why, and how, he came to apply a broad and historically informed intellectual framework to two issues which the majority of his fellow Conservative MPs regarded as, for the most part, marginal – Europe and Ulster. In addition, we draw attention to a clear and broadly continuous line of thinking on these issues, which ran from the early 1950s, when he was one of the rising stars of the Tory parliamentary party, through to his exile from its ranks in the 1960s and 1970s. An appreciation of the recurrent principles and distinctive contours of his thinking suggests the limitations of those interpretations which stress Powell's high degree of political opportunism.⁵

In order to understand the heterodox stances he adopted in the 1970s on Europe and Northern Ireland, more careful attention needs to be paid, we maintain, to the political thinking that he assembled in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Specifically we identify some of the most distinctive properties of his views of nationhood, sovereignty and the unique characteristics of the British institutional heritage, and explore how these came to shape his perspective on the British Empire and Commonwealth, at this time. We then trace his thinking

⁴ T.E. Utley, *Enoch Powell: The Man and His Thinking* (London, 1968); Andrew Roth, *Enoch Powell: Tory Tribune* (London, 1970); Roy Lewis, *Enoch Powell: Principle in Politics* (London, 1979). For a review see Peter Silcox, 'Enoch Powell: The Man and His Thinking. By T.E. Utley London: William Kimber (Toronto: Ryerson), 1968', *International Journal* 24:4 (1969), p. 850. For Powell's biographers in the 1990s see Robert Shepherd, *Enoch Powell* (London, 1996) and Simon Heffer, *Like the Roman: The Life of Enoch Powell* (London, 1998).

⁵ Paul Foot, *The Rise of Enoch Powell: An Examination of Enoch Powell's Attitude to Immigration and Race* (London, 1969). For a more recent example see A.S. Roe-Crines, Timothy Heppell and Michael Hill, 'Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' Speech: A Rhetorical Political Analysis', *British Politics* 11 (2016): pp. 72–94.

from this period up to his departure from the Conservative Party and decision to join the Ulster Unionists in the 1970s, alighting upon a number of texts and speeches which illustrate the continuing evolution of his thinking on these questions. The understanding of the indivisible and singular nature of parliamentary sovereignty which he developed, and then applied to controversial policy questions facing the British state, ensured that he was one of the first British Conservatives to reconcile himself to the abandonment of Empire, and one of the very few to reject the idea of the UK leading the Commonwealth. He was then one of a small minority of Conservative MPs who opposed Britain's entry to the European Community (EC), or 'Common Market', having initially favoured this idea. All of these positions, we will suggest, should be understood in relation to the underlying account of nationhood and parliamentary government which he developed earlier in his career, and which derived in part from his close reading of 18th and 19th century debates about colonial representation in the Westminster Parliament. And, his conception of the evolution and sanctity of an ancient form of English nationhood, and the indivisibility of the sovereignty of the Crown-in-Parliament, also led him to oppose proposals for devolution within the United Kingdom itself, most notably in Northern Ireland.

One important characteristic of this seam of thinking which merits particular emphasis was his sense of the intimate relationship between proposals for federation across the British Empire, and the doctrine of multiple sovereignties that underpinned these, and rising demands for the introduction of devolution *within* the UK. His principled opposition to federal thinking about Britain's external relations with other states extended also to his scepticism about political reforms that sought to take Britain in a more federal direction within its own borders. The guiding doctrine to which he adhered was a broadly Diceyan conception of a unitary state founded upon a single institutional source of sovereignty. To this English vein of constitutional

thinking he added a very distinctive commitment to the necessity of the culturally and racially unified nation.

We argue that Powell's positions on both the internal configuration of the nation state and its external relations were closely inter-related, and were applied by him on a fairly consistent basis throughout his career. Our interpretation therefore contrasts with those studies, like Corthorn's, which treat Powell's views on international relations and the internal politics of the United Kingdom as thematically distinct. In addition, we foreground the analysis of several lectures given by Powell in the mid-1950s to the Conservative Political Centre (CPC) which have been given only cursory treatment by his later interpreters.⁶ Our analysis draws upon a range of sources from Churchill College Archive and the Conservative Party Archive, including his writings and speeches in these decades, his private papers (and those of his close collaborator Angus Maude), and the official records of Swinton College and the CPC.

Using these materials, we show that he developed his thinking on devolution within the United Kingdom, and the future of the British Empire and Commonwealth, in tandem, and that this was first systematically aired in a series of interventions he made as a Member of Parliament in the early and mid-1950s. These involved speeches he gave in the chamber of the House of Commons, as well as contributions to the One Nation Group of MPs' publications, lectures at the Conservative Party's Swinton College and the CPC's summer schools, and articles he penned for various magazines and newspapers. In direct contrast to

⁶ Enoch Powell, Lecture to the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations (England) at Wadham College, University of Oxford, 11 July 1954. Published as Enoch Powell, 'The Empire of England', in Angus Maude et al., *Tradition and Change* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1954). Available at PUB 559/5, *Tradition and Change*, Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian, Oxford (herein CPA); and PUB 165/22, Enoch Powell, 'Nationalism', in David Douglas-Home et al., *World Perspectives* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1955) CPA. The fullest treatment of the first of these lectures is found in Shepherd, *Enoch Powell*, pp. 119–122.

the view of Powell as a maverick outsider in Tory party circles, which has remained a recurrent theme in much of the commentary devoted to him, we highlight instead his deep engagement with the Conservative Party's intellectual and political 'infrastructure' in the immediate post-war period.⁷ Powell used his position as a Member of Parliament, Conservative Party thinker and rising star, to advertise his political ambitions, advance his intellectual reputation, and stake out important new policy positions and perspectives for the Party. Rather ironically, it was when he was a mainstream political figure in Conservative circles that he began to deviate most markedly in his political thinking – about nation, sovereignty, and Empire – from many Conservatives at Westminster.

'The Empire of England'

In 1954 Powell was invited to deliver a lecture at Wadham College, Oxford University, which he titled 'The Empire of England', for a summer school being held to mark the 150th anniversary of Benjamin's Disraeli's birth.⁸ This event took place under the auspices of the CPC, which had been established in 1945 by RAB Butler, and was, by the 1950s, under the direction of one of the founding members of the One Nation Group of MPs, 'Cub' Alport. The Centre was a key part of a wider set of interlocking institutions designed to promote research, policy development and political education within the party, which supported the exchange of ideas between the leadership and activists. Much of its work was conducted thorough summer schools, publications and constituency discussion groups. These supplied

⁷ See in particular Mark Garnett and Kevin Hickson (eds), *Conservative Thinkers: the key contributors to the political thought of the modern Conservative Party*, (Manchester, 2009); Philip Norton, 'The Role of the Conservative Political Centre, 1945-98', in Stuart Ball and Ian Holliday (eds), *Mass Conservatism: the Conservatives and the Public since the 1880s* (Oxon, 2002) pp. 183–199; John Ramsden, *The Making of Conservative Party Policy: The Conservative Research Department Since 1929* (London, 1980); and Robert Walsh, 'The One Nation Group: A Tory Approach to Backbench Politics and Organisation', *Twentieth Century British History*, 11:2 (2000): 183–214.

⁸ Enoch Powell, 'Empire of England'.

important opportunities to shape and contest the climate of Conservative opinion, while also enabling grassroots views to be fed back to the frontbench. The CPC's summer schools were attended by leading political figures and thinkers, and gave them a chance to promote their own intellectual influence and political profile. Powell delivered a number of CPC lectures in these years – his chosen subjects including 'Priorities in the Social Services', 'Monopoly and competition' and 'Socialism and Conservatism'. His notorious 'Rivers of Blood' speech was itself hosted by the West Midlands branch of the organisation.⁹

His 1954 summer school lecture took its title from Benjamin Disraeli's 1872 Crystal Palace speech on 'Conservative and Liberal Principles,' and this choice was far from accidental. The Disraelian tradition was the foremost 'ancestral line' upon which the Conservative Party drew in the post-war period as it sought to renew its political thinking and policy platform, most notably in the field of social policy.¹⁰ Writing in January 1954, Powell argued that Disraeli still gave 'inspiration to a great political movement,' and suggested that '...when we turn to his words in the perplexities of our present generation, we start as though a live voice sounded at our elbow'.¹¹ Disraeli was an iconic reference for different parts of the Party, and he was claimed as a touchstone also by the adherents of a more modern Conservatism. In his lecture at the same event as Powell's, 'A Disraelian Approach to Modern Politics', Butler encouraged his audience to see Disraeli as an exemplar, contending that when he 'looked to our future as a party and as a nation, I rely not only upon the development of social reform,

⁹ For details of these lectures and Swinton College's course calendars in the mid-1950s see CCO4/5/358, 'Course for Candidates' Swinton, November 7–10 1952 and CCO4/1/492, 'Course for Undergraduates', 1954 and 'Course Calendar', January–April 1955, CPA. See also Norton, 'The Role of the Conservative Political Centre', p. 196.

¹⁰ David Seawright, 'One Nation', in Kevin Hickson (ed), *The Political Thought of the Conservative Party Since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 70.

¹¹ Enoch Powell Papers (POLL) 6/1/1 file 5, Enoch Powell, 'Disraeli', *Objective*, January 1954, Churchill College Archive (herein CCA), Cambridge. Also available in Rex Collings (ed), *Reflections of a Statesman, The Writings and Speeches of Enoch Powell*, (London, 1991), pp. 285–286.

but follow Disraeli's teaching in believing that the truest expression of our national unity, and the real safeguard of our liberties, lies in our national institution'.¹² The Victorian Prime Minister also figured in a 1950 CPC pamphlet, which reproduced two of Disraeli's best-known speeches – those at Manchester and Crystal Palace in 1872 – in order to explore 'the great objectives of Toryism'.¹³

But, when Powell turned to address the question of the history and dissolution of the British Empire in his Wadham lecture, he employed the Disraelian mantle in an entirely different way. Specifically, he turned Disraeli's own words against the defence of imperialism – the stance with which the 1872 speech is commonly associated. Powell began by citing Disraeli's observation from August 1852 that, 'These wretched colonies will all be independent in a few years and are a millstone round our necks', and subsequently drew upon the latter's reflections on self-government in the colonies, to buttress his own contention that the insuperable political logic at the heart of the British Empire pointed towards its dissolution into separate sovereignties.¹⁴ His scepticism about the durability of Empire marked him out from the views of most other Conservatives in parliament, as he argued that its loss was not 'for the most part accidental nor the product of errors of policy or perversities of intention, but the inevitable consequence of the political institutions of the UK and the character of its former and present dependencies'.¹⁵ Fellow MP Angus Maude's introduction to the collection in which Powell's lecture was published, warned its readers that the message might not be 'familiar or soothing to Conservative ears'.¹⁶

¹² RAB Butler, 'A Disraelian Approach to Modern Politics', in Maude, *Tradition and Change*, p. 12.

¹³ PUB 163/35, *Tory Democrat: Two Famous Disraeli Speeches*, CPA. The quote is from Walter Elliot's foreword.

¹⁴ Powell, 'Empire of England', quote on p. 41.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁶ Angus Maude, 'Introduction', in Maude, *Tradition and Change*, p. 7. See also Angus Maude Papers (MAUD) 2/1/2–2/1/3, Draft introduction to the 'Tradition and Change', CCA. Angus Maude's papers are uncatalogued and file

The basis of Powell's heterodox thinking was his understanding of the concept of sovereignty – its indivisible nature and foundational importance to political communities. Humanity was everywhere divided into separate 'sovereignties', defined as 'a group to all of whose members, but to no others, a single authority is able to give demands'. In the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, sovereignty over the different territories of the British Isles had been consolidated under a single crown, which in turn had been subordinated to a legislative assembly (with the exception of Ireland, which was not represented at Westminster until after the 1801 Act of Union). Separately, colonies had been established in North America that were also subject to the authority of the British monarchy, but these had not been accorded the right of representation within parliament. These developments 'concealed a simple but fateful dilemma', which Britain had over time been compelled to face. Either political representation had to be extended to include all of Great Britain's dominions or British sovereignty had to be reduced 'to the limits of the representation of the Parliament of Great Britain'.¹⁷ And, since considerations of geography made the representation of colonists in the Westminster Parliament impractical, the dissolution of empire into 'distinct and separate sovereignties' became inevitable. The efforts of successive British constitutionalists and leaders to find their way around this problem – from Burke to Disraeli and Joseph Chamberlain – had all been futile. 'Responsible government' for the dominions, with authority for foreign relations and defence reserved to the British Parliament, was their preferred, but ultimately unstable, preference, and was sustained only on the basis of British naval power and trading eminence.

references may change. Our thanks to the archivists at Churchill College Archive for granting us access to this collection.

¹⁷ Powell, 'Empire of England', p. 43.

For Powell, ‘when the dilemma emerged’ in these cases, it took on a ‘different form’ to those colonial situations where the British exercised their rule over a subject population. In this second kind of case there was no viable prospect of representing these subject peoples within the Westminster Parliament, since this implied ‘greater homogeneity in the electorate than can subsist between a European and non-European territory’, and yet full separation was feared by the British state because of the threat this posed to the integrity of Empire. Consequently, imperial claims over these territories could only be grounded in ‘force and necessity’, the ‘most difficult and embarrassing claim for a parliament to make’. Over time, this ‘hopeless logical ground’ collapsed beneath the feet of the British Parliament, he maintained, and the same process of separation into distinct sovereignties that had taken place in the dominions began to happen in the ‘dependent’ territories. In the case of the latter, however, ‘the separation does not even leave behind it the sentiment and tradition of common origins and mutual goodwill, but instead the heightened sense of racial and cultural difference’.¹⁸

Powell gave particular consideration within the broad historical compass he sketched in his talk to the impossibility of ‘federal’ solutions to these dilemmas. Broadly speaking, this was the idea – given intellectual foundation by the late Victorian historian J. R. Seeley in his ‘Expansion of England’ lectures, and politically in the campaigns for Imperial Federation and tariff reform – that the white settler colonies of ‘Greater Britain’ might be united with the UK in an imperial political union organised along federal lines. And, strikingly, in a period when the internal constitution of the UK was the subject of relatively little debate, he extended this logic to a consideration of the potential implications of any kind of ‘substantial’ devolution settlement, arguing in reference to Northern Ireland that:

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 46–53.

The anomaly whereby a territory enjoying local autonomy participates through its representatives in controlling the local affairs of another, is tolerated in the trivial instance of twelve Ulster M.P.'s at Westminster since 1922 simply because it is trivial. On any substantial scale it would be intolerable.¹⁹

It followed that the British Empire and Commonwealth were ultimately incompatible with the constitutional order established by Britain's historical pattern of constitutional development, and that its internal unity was similarly a reflection of the foundational principle of parliamentary sovereignty.

This commitment to the logical and practical indivisibility of sovereignty was undergirded by his conviction that culturally heterogeneous populations were unlikely to share a political community peacefully – an idea that was central to the racialised arguments he expressed in his later 'Rivers of Blood' speech, but which played an important role in this thinking in this earlier period too. And, he returned to this theme in another, little known, lecture he delivered in the 1950s – a presentation on nationalism at the 1955 CPC summer school at Oxford University. His main aim was to demonstrate that the nations or federations created out of 'non-viable administrative units' were illusory and transitional, rather than 'true' constituencies.²⁰ He maintained in particular that the survival of an elective assembly depended on the homogeneity of the population it represented. Additionally, '[t]he principle of majority decision is decisive: it splits society along its natural lines of fission into the sections sufficiently homogenous for all their members to accept the will of the majority as their own.' These lines of fission bounded communities that were formed, he presumed, around shared linguistic and racial characteristics:

... provided that differences of race, in the absence of religious or linguistic differences, are marked by plain and visible distinctions, such as colour; for men assume that those who look differently from themselves have different

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 44–45.

²⁰ Enoch Powell, 'Nationalism', p. 37.

interests – there could scarcely be anti-Semitism as we have known it unless Jews were recognizable at sight.²¹

There are numerous indications throughout his speech of a highly essentialist understanding of racial differences, and of his firm belief in the incompatibility of political stability and ethno-cultural diversity. The particular context for this lecture was the creation of new federations as vehicles for decolonisation which were intended to integrate white settler and indigenous populations – for instance the Central African Federation, established in 1953 from the colonies of Nyasaland, and Northern and Southern Rhodesia. Powell clearly believed that such a political creation was both illusory and unstable, and therefore doomed to fail. Yet, the open expression of this view would have set him at odds with one of the core tenets of Conservative colonial policy in this period. Earlier in 1953, he had backed away from the political consequences of his scepticism, deciding against proceeding with a speech attacking the Conservative government's central African policy for fear of being considered a serial rebel. In later years, he came to regret this decision, believing he would have been in a stronger position if he had gone on the record to say that the Federation was a mistake.²² His 1955 lecture on nationalism offered him the chance to make his broad argument in less concrete and more coded ways.

Powell also chose in this lecture to extend his core argument to the question of relations between Ireland and Great Britain. 'There is no such thing as an Anglo-Irish electorate; we proved that'.²³ Because there was no viable Anglo-Irish nation, there could be no durable Home Rule settlement, only the inevitable development of distinct national sovereignties. This very singular understanding of Anglo-Irish relations would come to assume

²¹ Ibid., p. 39.

²² Enoch Powell, speaking in the 1987 television documentary, *Enoch: A Life in Politics*, cited in Shepherd, *Enoch Powell*, p. 116.

²³ Powell, 'Nationalism', p. 39.

considerable importance in the 1970s and 1980s, and was reprised by him to express his unstinting support for unionism in Northern Ireland in later years. He repeatedly expressed hostility to the idea of power sharing in the six counties and insisted that Ulster could only 'share in the unity' of the nation, if it shared 'without qualification or diminution, in the undivided sovereignty' of the Parliament of the United Kingdom.²⁴

The End of Empire

The main political backdrop to Powell's twin summer school lectures, in 1954 and 1955, was the debate about the future of the British Empire and Commonwealth taking place in the Conservative Party in the 1950s. This was a prominent theme in CPC pamphlets and publications, including one from 1951 entitled 'Britain Strong and Free'. In reference to the Empire, its central argument was that:

To keep and develop this great and unique brotherhood is a first task of British statesmanship. The Conservative Party, by long tradition and settled belief is the Party of Empire. We are proud of its past ... We shall do all that lies within our power to promote its unity, its strength and its progress.²⁵

Despite his wariness about the consequences of his stance on Empire for his fledgling political career, Powell was widely known in Tory circles as one of the first politicians to renounce the imperial heritage as he rejected the increasingly prevalent belief that Britain had obligations and responsibilities to the former peoples of its colonies, and to the wider international community.

He had arrived at this position, gradually and falteringly. Following a short tenure as a Professor of Greek at the University of Sydney and a subsequent military posting in Cairo, Powell had served in the British army in India from 1943 until 1946. According to his official

²⁴ Enoch Powell, 'To a Meeting in the Ulster Hall', 18 April 1974, in Collings, *Reflections of a Statesman*, p. 502

²⁵ MAUD 4/2/1, 'Britain Strong and Free', 1951, CCA.

biographer, Simon Heffer, he was greatly affected by the decision to grant India independence, and subsequently came to terms with it, in part, by radically altering his vision of Britain's geopolitical character.²⁶ Camilla Schofield contends that this stance was not simply a response to the trauma of the loss of India, but emerged at a point when Powell was beginning to 'articulate a particular political vision' which required a 'new conception of sovereignty'.²⁷ This understanding, she suggests, was developed in direct opposition to the rising spirit of liberal internationalism in the decades after 1945. The growing popularity of the Commonwealth idea represented the most concerning manifestation of such an ethos for Powell, constituting an 'unfortunate part' of the post-war project of 'sinking national sovereignty in organizations for uniting the world'.²⁸ Internationalism of this kind was also, as Schofield suggests, a product of the deepening Cold War, giving sustenance to the developing hegemony of the United States and its leadership role within a newly imagined 'west', a development which concerned him greatly.

For Powell, these trends represented dangerous abridgements of the principle of parliamentary sovereignty, and the autonomy of British statecraft. And, in response, he grew increasingly committed to elucidating and demonstrating the unique historical provenance of the latter. In the same year as 'The Empire of England' lecture, he published a widely read book with Maude – *Biography of a Nation*. A review in the *Spectator* called it 'absurd as history, but fascinating as a contemporary political document'.²⁹ Its intellectual merits aside, this volume affords an important source for Powell's views on the history and constitutional character of the British nation in these formative years in his political thinking. In this wide-ranging overview of Britain's modern historical development, considerable space was given to

²⁶ Heffer, *Like the Roman*, pp. 172–173.

²⁷ Schofield, *Enoch Powell*, pp. 84–92.

²⁸ Heffer, *Like the Roman*, p. 207.

²⁹ Henry Fairlie, 'Political Commentary', *Spectator*, 26 August 1955.

the political crisis engendered by demands for Irish Home Rule and the challenges arising from the claim of the 'Old Dominions' for self-government in the first half of the 20th century. The former had marked 'a new phase in the self-consciousness of the British nation'. And the latter process was, as Powell had for a while been arguing, inevitable. By the close of the First World War, 'the sleeping dog' of self-rule for the Old Dominions was 'thoroughly awake'.³⁰ Both he and Maude shared the heterodox view that Empire had become a burden for Britain long before the end of the Second World War.

This pattern of thinking about British history, sovereignty and the limits of federalism began to surface in Powell's public interventions on a number of different issues very early in the decade – and much earlier than has typically been recognised. In 1951 he spoke in a debate on the Second Reading of the Diplomatic Immunities (Commonwealth and Republic of Ireland) Bill, describing the legislation as 'one of the progeny ... of that most evil statute, the British Nationality Act 1948.' That latter piece of legislation, he argued, had:

...effected a complete revolution in the basis of British subjecthood. It substituted for the old basis, which was our duty of allegiance to our common Sovereign, an entirely new basis.

He contended too that the 1948 Act should be replaced, and consideration given to a 'return to the old conception of common citizenship' – a prospect which, he was at pains to point out, was held open by the Conservative Party's 1949 statement of Imperial Policy.³¹ But the logic of his own argument pointed towards a different conclusion – that the British Empire and Commonwealth should be dissolved into separate jurisdictions. And as early as 1951, he was intimating that this was the path he would prefer, arguing to the One Nation Group of MPs that 'the 19th century Empire was overblown' and calling for a reassessment of 'what

³⁰ Angus Maude and Enoch Powell, *Biography of a Nation* revised edition (London, 1970), pp. 192–194 and 206.

³¹ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 494, 5 December 1951, 2455–2457.

features and parts of it remain essential'.³² He made these heterodox arguments against the backdrop of a number of sharp divisions within the One Nation Group over foreign affairs, especially over issues such as West Indian immigration, as Robert Walsha has shown.³³ The following year, in an article he drafted for the *Birmingham Post* (which was never published), he maintained that 'To most of the world outside it seems that the British Empire, if it does not already belong to the past, has but a short lease of life. Only here in England, like a nation of Rip Van Winkles, we live in a dream world of undisturbed complacency.' He observed too that it would be 'something if the work of the CPC helps to end the too-long period of Conservative smugness about the Empire'.³⁴

It was in the parliamentary debate on the 1953 Royal Titles Bill that he displayed this vein of thinking about nation and Empire to most powerful effect, and his intervention came to wider attention. The Statute of Westminster 'preserved what were then considered to be two essential unities' – the unity of the Monarch through succession and the unity of the title held by the crown. The Bill, he declared, would change that second unity by making the Monarch crown over a number of *separate* kingdoms. What for many of his fellow MPs was a sensible piece of constitutional tidying-up, was for him an issue that raised the most profound questions about the idea and consequences of dividing sovereignty. His notable speech on this issue prefaces some of the thinking he laid out in 'The Empire of England'. In Parliament he asked if by 'recognising the division of the realm into separate realms, are we not opening the way for that other remaining unity – the last unity of all – that of the person to go the way of the rest?'. And he famously declared that the addition of the new title 'Head of the Commonwealth' was 'essentially a sham'. The core of national unity was that 'all the parts

³² POLL 3/1/1/1, Enoch Powell, 'The Revival of Britain', 1951, p. 3 as cited in Corthorn, *Enoch Powell*, p. 24.

³³ Walsha, 'One Nation Group', pp. 212–213.

³⁴ POLL 6/1/1 file 5, Powell, 'Problems of Empire', draft of an article for the *Birmingham Post*, November 1952, CCA.

recognise that in certain circumstances they would sacrifice themselves for the interests of the whole'. Without that 'instinctive, deliberate determination, there is no unity'.³⁵ The labels 'empire' or 'commonwealth' could not maintain or create a nation, and yet the changes proposed by the Royal Titles Bill implied that a meaningful unity between the crown and the Commonwealth existed, even where post-colonial independent countries had become republics.³⁶

Despite his growing scepticism about Empire, Powell was a member of the Suez Group of MPs, an influential faction of Tory parliamentarians united by the belief that the UK should adopt a more pro-active stance in response to threats to its position in Egypt. The group had a diverse membership, including Maude, and other One Nation Tories, alongside outspoken imperialists like Julian Amery. As Schofield points out, Powell's involvement was at first motivated by concerns about "the entire British position in Eastern and Central Africa" and then later by his antipathy to the rising influence of 'another enemy' – an "advancing American imperialism" that was trying to eliminate British influence around the world and especially in the Suez Canal region'.³⁷ Powell was one of 26 Tory MPs who voted on 29 July 1954 against the agreement struck with the Egyptian government to withdraw British troops from the Suez Canal Base. In the historiography devoted to Powell, this move has commonly been taken to signal the last gasp of his imperialist orthodoxy, before his subsequent break with the Suez Group at the end of the year.³⁸ But this account is not entirely accurate. For Powell justified his opposition to the Suez deal not on the basis of a conventional defence of the British Empire, but on rather different grounds. He argued that it was deceitful to pretend either that Britain could reoccupy the Canal Base if it chose to do so, or that it could maintain a strategic

³⁵ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 512, 3 March 1953, 129–257.

³⁶ Schofield, *Enoch Powell*, pp. 105–106.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

³⁸ Corthorn, *Enoch Powell*, p. 25; Heffer, *Like the Roman*, p. 193; Shepherd, *Enoch Powell*, pp. 118–119.

position in Cyprus, Kenya and Jordan that had the same advantages that accrued from its occupation of the Suez Canal. His argument here was for British military and diplomatic activism in defence of what he would later call an ‘Empire of positions’ – a hard-headed commitment to maintaining the country’s presence in various strategic locations:

After the war, I thought it was still possible for there to be a political link between the United Kingdom and India. I realised that that was an absurdity...after the evidence that India could not be part of the same political system, I still believed for a short time that an Empire of positions – that is to say the possession of points of communication around the globe – gave the significance to this country and a tenable and lasting position. That too was wrong and my lesson was learnt.³⁹

He therefore moved towards his well-known post-imperialist position in two broad intellectual stages, rather than simply working through the logical consequences of India’s departure from the British Empire, as Heffer contends, or by undergoing an abrupt ‘revolution’ in his thinking in the mid 1950s, as Shepherd argues.⁴⁰ He moved from defending the political unity of the British Empire, to believing in a British world system anchored in the defence of key strategic positions, to – finally -- embracing an openly post-imperial stance. And he did so by drawing deeply on the perspectives he was developing in this period on the UK historical trajectory and the nature of Parliamentary sovereignty, and on his increasingly intense views on race and nationalism. The convictions that Powell laid out in these speeches, lectures and articles in the mid-1950s, were aired far more widely, and contentiously, in relation to the public causes he later pursued, but it was this earlier period that they came together in his mind.

A re-assessment of his thinking in this period on issues affecting the internal governance of the UK – specifically the position of Wales and the status of local government – illustrates the deep inter-connection between his views on the external and internal

³⁹ Powell, ‘Face the Press’, Channel 4 TV, 9 October 1983, in Collings, *Reflections of a Statesman*, p. 587.

⁴⁰ Heffer, *Like a Roman*, p104; Shepherd, *Enoch Powell*, p. 119.

dimensions of British sovereignty at this time. As a researcher for the Conservative Parliamentary Secretariat in the late 1940s, he had been responsible for developing party policy on Wales, and his interest and expertise in the subject were key to him being offered the position of Parliamentary Under Secretary for Wales in the Home Office, which he chose to decline.⁴¹ More generally he vehemently rejected the idea that only Scots could be Scottish Ministers or Welsh MPs represent Wales in the government, arguing that such logic would lead down the road to the 'dissolution of the United Kingdom'.⁴² And he contended in 1954 that local government had no independent existence or justification separable from the authority delegated to it by central government: 'Whatever the appearances, this local government is always a devolution of sovereignty by the central government, because it would not exist unless the central government created or tolerated it.' He notably framed his arguments against the internal divisibility of sovereignty and rejection of external federation as two sides of the same coin: 'The movement at the end of the nineteenth century for a federal Europe never had the ghost of a chance, any more than a federal United Kingdom.'⁴³

In later decades, Powell continued to hold to the same broad positions, both on the internal unity of the UK – which he termed 'the most serious of all political subjects' – and on Empire. And there is a clear line of continuity in his thinking about these themes into the 1960s and beyond. He built upon his critique of imperialism from the early 1950s in a speech he gave to the 1964 committee at Trinity College Dublin, claiming that 'grave psychological damage' was done to the nation by the myth that 'Britain was once a great imperial power, which built up a mighty empire over generations'. And he returned again to Disraeli to bolster his heterodox position, reiterating his warning that the colonies would become a 'millstone'

⁴¹ Heffer, *Like the Roman*, p. 180 and Shepherd, *Enoch Powell*, p. 110.

⁴² Cited in Shepherd, *Enoch Powell*, p. 110.

⁴³ POLL 6/1/1, Powell, 'Local Government Reform', *The National and English Review*, 143:858 (1954), CCA.

around the UK's neck, and pleading for the country to 'free herself from the long servitude' of its imperial past.⁴⁴ A year later he returned to those themes when he called for a re-writing of Britain's history with 'the imperial episode in parenthesis'.⁴⁵

The same broad argument against internal forms of devolution which emerged in this earlier period continued to echo through his public discourse. He claimed, for instance, during a speech at Prestatyn in 1968 that 'England will never repeat her Irish mistake', for it had 'learnt once and for all, that enforced unity is a curse, to which almost any other consequence or condition is preferable'. In the same speech he speculated that no country 'had so much experience as Britain in playing the midwife to new nations' and commented on the 'breath-taking acceleration' of the proliferation of nations that had once been part of the empire.⁴⁶

In 1970 he contributed an article, 'The Myth of Empire', to the Diamond Jubilee issue of *The Round Table* journal, in which he returned to the central theme of his 1954 lecture – the notion that the 'failure' of Britain's imperial episode was 'not merely predictable but predicted'. More bluntly, it was 'no feat of prophecy to assert that long before the twentieth century was out, the United Kingdom would be a country without empire'. He went on to explore the careers of Lord Alfred Milner and Joseph Chamberlain, both of whom he depicted as entertaining imperial fantasies about a 'permanent organic union' among the states within the empire.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ 'Speech by The Right Hon. J. Enoch Powell, M.P. to the 1964 Committee, Trinity College, Dublin, at 8.15 p.m. Friday, 13 November, 1964'. Available online: <http://www.enochpowell.info/speeches> (all speeches from this online archive were last accessed on 17 March 2020).

⁴⁵ 'Power and Glory: The Nation in the Mirror', 6 November 1965. Available online: <http://www.enochpowell.info/speeches>.

⁴⁶ 'Speech by the Rt Hon. J. Enoch Powell, MP to the North Wales Advisory Council dinner, at the Royal Lido Hotel, Prestatyn, 7.30 p.m., Friday 27th September, 1968'. Available online: <http://www.enochpowell.info/speeches>.

⁴⁷ Enoch Powell, 'The Myth of Empire', *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 60:240 (1970): pp. 435–441, 435 and 437.

These critical reflections on federalist ideas and schemes – past and present – were given a further airing in his short biographical study of Chamberlain, published in 1977. In its epilogue – made famous by the aphorism that ‘All political lives...end in failure’ – Powell contended that Chamberlain planted his feet on a ‘rock-hard truth’ in his opposition to Home Rule for Ireland, realising that ‘a self-governing Ireland could not remain part of the United Kingdom, unless the United Kingdom itself were transformed – or dissolved – into a federation.’ And yet too often Chamberlain, he judged, ‘took refuge from this truth,’ turning to the illusory promise of imperial federation.⁴⁸

The heterodox conclusions which Powell inferred from this underlying vein of thinking were, by the 1970s, emerging into plain sight. And now, freed from the constraints of political ambition by his exile from the Conservative Party mainstream, he began to pursue several controversial causes, all of which were linked to the understanding of sovereignty he had spent two decades developing. Uncompromising objection to the proposition that sovereignty could be divided internally, among the disparate parts of the United Kingdom, or externally, with other parts of the world, became central themes in his interventions on the question of the UK’s membership of the European Community and civil strife in Northern Ireland. We consider in turn the nature and terms of his contributions to the debates associated with these constitutional issues.

The UK and Europe

At a February 1974 ‘Get Britain Out’ rally in Birmingham, Powell made the controversial revelation that he would cast his vote for the Labour Party in the upcoming General Election, in protest at the Conservative government’s decision to take Britain into the EEC.⁴⁹ Labour,

⁴⁸ Enoch Powell, *Joseph Chamberlain* (London, 1977), pp. 151–152.

⁴⁹ Heffer, *Like the Roman*, pp. 705–707.

under Harold Wilson, had made a manifesto commitment to a renegotiation of Britain's membership of the Community and a subsequent national vote on whether to remain on the newly agreed terms.⁵⁰ For Prime Minister Edward Heath this was an act of betrayal: Powell as a 'champion of the right showed that he would sacrifice all his principles for a remote chance that Labour might take Britain out of Europe'.⁵¹

Prior to the 1970s, his position on the 'European question' began to shift. In what Powell referred to as the "first manifestation" of his "opposition to the loss of British self-government", he refused to support the Schuman Plan, which proposed pooling Europe's coal and steel industries under a supra-national High Authority. Yet, subsequently, he supported Harold Macmillan's (ultimately unsuccessful) decision to apply for European Economic Community (EEC) membership in 1961. When Harold Wilson launched a second attempt to join in 1967, Powell again voted in favour. His official biographer argues convincingly that during the 1960s he believed that he was voting for the UK to join a free trade area, not a political union.⁵² And for the vast majority of his political contemporaries, membership of the EEC was primarily seen in 'pragmatic and strategic terms' in the early 1960s.⁵³ Prior to the first application, Powell had been developing his thinking about the virtues of freer markets, and his belief in the desirability of a European free trade area followed from this.⁵⁴ He argued that 'no economic truths are more clear or certain than [those] upon which the principle of free trade is founded', and yet 'the application of the principle has been the rare exception rather than the rule'.⁵⁵ Equally, as Powell himself later explained, he had not

⁵⁰ Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*.

⁵¹ Edward Heath, *Course of My Life: The Autobiography of Edward Heath* (London, 1998), p. 516.

⁵² Heffer, *Like the Roman*, pp. 153 and 304–306.

⁵³ Alan Milward, *The United Kingdom and the European Community Volume I: The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy 1945–1963* (London: Whitehall History Publishing, 2002), p. 443.

⁵⁴ Garnett and Hickson, *Conservative Thinkers*, 60–64.

⁵⁵ Enoch Powell, 'Economists in Politics', *Spectator*, 15 October 1954.

really been ‘concentrating on the issue’ before the late 1960s, and only awoke to the political dimensions of the EEC project at that point. By then he saw the Community as “‘an embryonic political union’... something he could not bear to see Britain join’.⁵⁶ And even if he did have any reservations about the decision to seek membership in 1961, his position as Minister for Health inhibited him from openly criticising Macmillan’s policy.

Once he came to the view that the EEC was at root a political, rather than an economic, project, this judgement framed his hostility to the UK’s proposed membership of it. In a speech in Tamworth ahead of the 1970 General Election, he explained the ‘profoundly political’ and ‘far-reaching ... implications’ of the EEC’s plans for its own future development. They included the possibility of a single currency and an elected Parliament. Both were alarming prospects for him:

A single currency means a single government, and that single government would be the government whose policies determined every aspect of economic life. In the Common Market that government would not be a British government; it would be a continental government...⁵⁷

He could not believe that the people of the United Kingdom ‘ought to submit, or would submit’ to major political decisions, such as taxation, being taken ‘by the government of a political unit in which they were a minority’.⁵⁸ This stance echoed his discussion of representation in his 1955 lecture on nationalism. The organisation of Western Europe into nations with majority representative government had made it impossible to conceive of national independence in other terms. The ‘self-government’ of sovereign independence had become merged with the ‘sense of possessing a sovereign representative assembly’.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Heffer, *Life the Roman*, pp. 518 and 579–585.

⁵⁷ Enoch Powell, ‘Election Address’, Tamworth, June 1970 in Collings, *Reflections of a Statesman*, p. 469.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 470.

⁵⁹ Powell, ‘Nationalism’, p. 40.

At the root of his critique of the dangerous political aspects of European integration was his commitment to the indivisible character of national sovereignty. During the October 1971 parliamentary debates on the terms negotiated by the Heath government, he placed considerable emphasis upon the indisputable character of the decision to join the Community. It involved ‘a cession by the House – initially perhaps minor, but destined to grow, of its present sovereignty’. In his view, this was an ‘unprecedented act of renunciation’.⁶⁰ If it voted for the UK to join the EEC, Parliament would effectively renounce its own sovereignty, not least because the Community intended to develop its own representative institutions. In order for the EEC to have a ‘true Parliament’, ‘the inhabitants of Western Europe including the British Isles would have to be transformed into a single politically homogeneous electorate’.⁶¹

In the months leading up to the 1975 referendum Powell consistently maintained that ‘The society, the institutions, the laws, the constitution, the habits, the assumptions of the British are incompatible with the system of the EEC’. As a result, the UK would ‘never be a satisfactory or amenable part of the Economic Community’.⁶² As Robert Saunders notes, Powell’s objections were ultimately rooted in his distinctive understanding of British history, and his sense of ‘... Britain’s *failure* to come to terms with the end of Empire. It was rooted in a false idea of British history, which saw the nation as broken by its loss of imperial power’.⁶³ Powell had begun to express this view at the start of the 1950s, and aired it regularly in the subsequent decade: ‘The myth of the British Empire is one of the most extraordinary paradoxes in political history. During the whole of the period in which Britain is imagined to

⁶⁰ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) 823, 28 October 1971, 2186–2889.

⁶¹ Enoch Powell, ‘To the Croydon South Young Conservatives Annual Conferences’, Salisbury, 10 November 1973, in Collings, *Reflections of a Statesman*, p. 473.

⁶² ‘Extract from a speech by the Rt. Hon. J. Enoch Powell, MP to a public meeting held under the auspices of the National Referendum Campaign at St Emmanuel’s Church hall, Hornsey Road, N.7?’. Available online, <http://www.enochpowell.info/speeches>.

⁶³ Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*, p. 268.

have created her Empire, she was not only unconscious of doing any such thing, but positively sure that she was not.’⁶⁴ With Maude he made a similar point in *Biography of a Nation*: ‘The twenty years after World War II had been, for the British, a period in which their idea of themselves and their place in the world underwent an unprecedentedly severe revision, which, to all but the most determined self-deception, was a revision downwards.’⁶⁵ The idea of sharing elements of the state’s sovereignty with a supra-national body was, in his mind, fundamentally incompatible with the course of British history and the character of its political institutions.

Ulster

Powell’s feud with Conservative leader Edward Heath over the EEC became tangled up with his emerging role in Northern Irish politics. After deciding not to seek re-election as a Conservative MP at the February 1974 General Election, he joined the Ulster Unionist Party. At the October election of that year he was returned to Parliament as its MP for South Down.⁶⁶ The relationship between Britain and Northern Ireland became a central theme of his public rhetoric by 1975, and at various points he introduced the EEC as a further complicating element of it. As Saunders shows, ‘Powell’s speeches flattered the historical sensibility of Ulster Protestantism, likening resistance to the EEC to the muster of the Ulster Volunteers in 1912.’⁶⁷ For example, Powell claimed that ‘Heath’s hatred of Ulster ““and his impatience to find some way, any way, of getting rid of it altogether”” was one reason ““why he forced the United Kingdom into the EEC””’.⁶⁸ Even before he joined the Ulster Unionists,

⁶⁴ ‘Speech by The Right Hon. J. Enoch Powell, M.P. to the 1964 Committee, Trinity College, Dublin’.

⁶⁵ Maude and Powell, *Biography of a Nation*, p. 209.

⁶⁶ Heffer, *Like the Roman*, p. 728 and 736.

⁶⁷ Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*, p. 305.

⁶⁸ Powell quoted in *Ibid.*

he entertained several conspiratorial theories about the relationship between Ulster and the EEC. In the context of a Northern Ireland Committee meeting to discuss Unionist dissatisfaction with Westminster, he declared that 'European officials tended to refer to Great Britain and Ireland rather than the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland,' a shift that was being 'cultivated by Dublin'.⁶⁹

But deeper lines of thinking underlay his stance towards Northern Ireland. The indivisibility of sovereignty within the Anglo-British nation, in particular, was central to his understanding of the relationship between the six counties and Great Britain. He refused to accept that the nationalist community was anything other than an integral part of the British nation, which should be fully represented, along with the rest of Ulster, in the Westminster Parliament. In 1972 he delivered a comprehensive critique of the Heath government's policies, which in his view failed to comprehend the 'basic reality' of Ulster. If Northern Ireland was to be saved, government policy had to be 'radically altered' so as to 'place beyond doubt ... that the integrity of this province as part of the kingdom will be upheld'.⁷⁰ Once he became an Ulster Unionist, he maintained this position and extended it to a critique of the under-representation of Northern Ireland in Westminster. 'If Northern Ireland, as all assert, is part of the United Kingdom, then Northern Ireland has an indefensible and indisputable claim to be represented in the Parliament of the United Kingdom as amply as any other part.'⁷¹ In the fraught political circumstances generated by the civil war that had broken out in the North of Ireland, Powell drew uncompromising conclusions from these premises. The United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland were two separate nations, and movement, migration and trade

⁶⁹ POLL 9/2/1, Minutes of the Northern Ireland Committee, 18 January 1974, CCA.

⁷⁰ Enoch Powell, 'To the Co. Armagh Unionist Association', 28 July 1972 in Collings, *Reflections of a Statesman*, pp. 492–495.

⁷¹ Powell, 'To a Meeting in the Ulster Hall', p. 500.

between them should be rigorously policed and controlled.⁷² In practice, this would have meant repudiating the Common Travel Area between the UK and the Republic as well as various additional rights which had been extended in the UK to Irish citizens.

The consistent motif of his speeches in these years was his insistence that Northern Ireland be viewed as integral to the United Kingdom, and governed, like all other parts, from the same sovereign source, a stance that brought him into some tension with his new colleagues in the Ulster Unionist Party who were in favour of the restoration of devolved government. And, he continued to object to the relative under-representation of the North in terms of the number of parliamentary seats it had been allocated.

His scepticism towards the merits of devolved governing arrangements in Northern Ireland carried over, in the 1970s, into his sharp opposition to growing support for the notion of devolution for Scotland and Wales in response to the rise of nationalism in both of these contexts. In the parliamentary debates triggered by the Labour government's attempt to introduce devolution in January 1976, Powell insisted that:

...it is not possible for the same electorate to be represented directly in two legislative Assemblies unless one of two things occurs; either the unitary State must become federal, with a pre-determined area within which the one set of elected representatives is sovereign and another area in which the representation of the whole realm is to be sovereign; or there must sooner or later as a consequences be separation and the recognition of separate sovereignties.⁷³

In expressing this view, he reverted back to the underpinning ideas he had developed two decades earlier about the incompatibility of federal models with the British constitutional order. Between these two alternatives there lay no middle ground: 'the establishment of directly elected legislative Assemblies will confront us with the choice of separation, of

⁷² Powell, 'To the Co Armagh Unionist Association', p. 493.

⁷³ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) 903, 19 January 1976, 925–1076.

conversion to a federal State with all its implications, or of an attempt to reverse the process and somehow subordinate the new Assemblies to the sovereignty of this House'.⁷⁴

Powellite Redux: Sovereignty and Brexit

Throughout the 1980s, Powell expressed considerable disquiet at the direction of travel taken by successive Conservative governments on the questions of Northern Ireland and European integration. He accused Margaret Thatcher of 'treachery' over her government's role in the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and warned that she would fall into 'public contempt'.⁷⁵ Although less outspoken on Europe in this period, he also questioned the Conservative government's motives during the passage of the Single European Act, and urged Parliament to 'insist that the Government make clear in advance' the kind of legislation the new treaty would represent.⁷⁶ Thatcher's subsequent turn against the European Union, vociferously expressed in her Bruges speech in 1988, elicited his approbation. Thereafter, his thinking proved increasingly congruent with the growing mood of hostility to the EU which was apparent on parts of the Thatcherite right.

His death in 1998 meant that he did not witness the seismic shock registered by the result of the Brexit Referendum in June 2016. Yet, Powell's longstanding insistence on the indivisibility of parliamentary sovereignty and his belief that representative government in Britain was incompatible with membership of the EU, were to become familiar ideas in the British political mainstream some years after his death. He never himself used the phrase 'take back control,' but the primary argument of the 'Leave' campaign – that British sovereignty had been abrogated by its membership of the EU and should be restored to the Westminster

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) 86, Prime Minister's Questions, 14 November 1985, 681–686.

⁷⁶ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons) 93, 5 March 1986, 335–418.

Parliament – may have one of its roots in Powell’s stance in the 1970s, and the intellectual underlay for it which he developed after 1945.

How this vein of thinking about sovereignty, nationhood and Britain’s constitutional order moved out from the margins of British politics, and what are the intellectual and political threads that connect Powell to later generations of Tory Eurosceptic, are questions that merit fuller consideration by those seeking to understand the genesis of Brexit. Powell’s toxic reputation was such that few Conservatives were willing to collaborate openly with him in the 1980s and 1990s. But as Corthorn points out, leading Eurosceptic MPs, including those who rebelled against John Major’s government over the legislation to enact the Maastricht Treaty, acknowledged their debt to Powell, and he corresponded regularly with a number of them.⁷⁷

Conclusion

Enoch Powell’s abiding political preoccupations – which often appeared eccentric in their day – now sit at the centre of British politics. These include the question of what national sovereignty should mean, Britain’s membership of the EU, the relationship between Ulster, Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, and the implications of devolution. Yet Powell is today chiefly known for one particular issue – the inflammatory, anti-immigrant racism he employed in his ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech. As a result, its intellectual underpinning, and that of his other politically explosive interventions in the 1960s and 1970s, and the roots of these in his close engagement with the Conservative Party’s intellectual and political infrastructure in

⁷⁷ Corthorn, *Enoch Powell*, pp. 130–131. See also Iain Duncan Smith, ‘Foreword’ in Lord Howard of Rising (ed.) *Enoch at 100*, (London, 2014) and Luke Stanley, *The ‘Dispossessed’, the ‘Never-Possessed’ and the ‘Bastards’*, The Bruges Group, 2014, p. 20. Available online: https://www.brugesgroup.com/images/media_centre/papers/TheDispossessedtheBastards.pdf (last accessed, 5 July 2019).

the 1950s, as well as the broadly continuous lines of thinking that ran across his career, have largely remained out of sight in public reflections on him. In the academic literature too, insufficient attention has been paid to the constellation of his political thinking in the early 1950s. Yet, it was in this formative period, we suggest, that he developed his signature ideas on nationhood and sovereignty, drawing upon a distinctive reading of Britain's political and institutional history. These undergirded his deep opposition to arguments for devolution within Britain, as well as his hostility to proposals for sharing the sovereignty of the UK externally, in its relations to the countries of the British Empire, Commonwealth or the EEC (and, later, the EU). In his lectures and writings of 1954 and 1955, he developed an intellectual framework which sustained his deep scepticism towards attempts to divide national sovereignty and the institutions of the Crown-in-Parliament. The Anglo-British nation was drawn in his rhetoric in starkly essentialist and ethno-cultural terms, leading Powell to conclude that cross-border immigration was inherently incompatible with the maintenance of a coherent national identity in the UK, and its enduring tradition of parliamentary government.

The intellectual foundations for his later positions on race, European integration and Ulster were, therefore, laid much earlier in his career than his interpreters tend to suggest, and informed the politically heterodox positions he took on some of the major constitutional issues of the day in the 1970s and 1980s. Tracing the lineages of Powell's thinking back to the 1950s aids an appreciation of the linkages between his core beliefs and later controversial policy positions, and makes more coherent a political career otherwise marked by episodic eruptions and a sharp division between the roles of Ministerial insider and backbench outcast. It was his 'abiding concern' with the 'definition and expression of British nationhood' that Thatcher recognised as the unifying thread in Powell's career-long opposition to 'threats posed individually but connectedly by post-Imperial delusions, by mass immigration, by attempts to break Ulster away from the Union and, finally and crucially, by the challenge to

national sovereignty from the institutions of Europe'.⁷⁸ Recovering this deeply rooted line of thinking, and understanding its connections to his controversial positions on a number of key public issues from the late 1960s, are important tasks for those seeing to understand the political and intellectual influence, and enduring legacy, of one of Britain's most complex and under-estimated 20th century political figures.

⁷⁸ Margaret Thatcher, 'When Powell was right: A personal look at a biography of Enoch Powell, recalling his contribution to British political life', *Daily Telegraph*, 22 November 1998. Available online: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4716306/When-Powell-was-right.html> (last accessed, 5 July 2019).