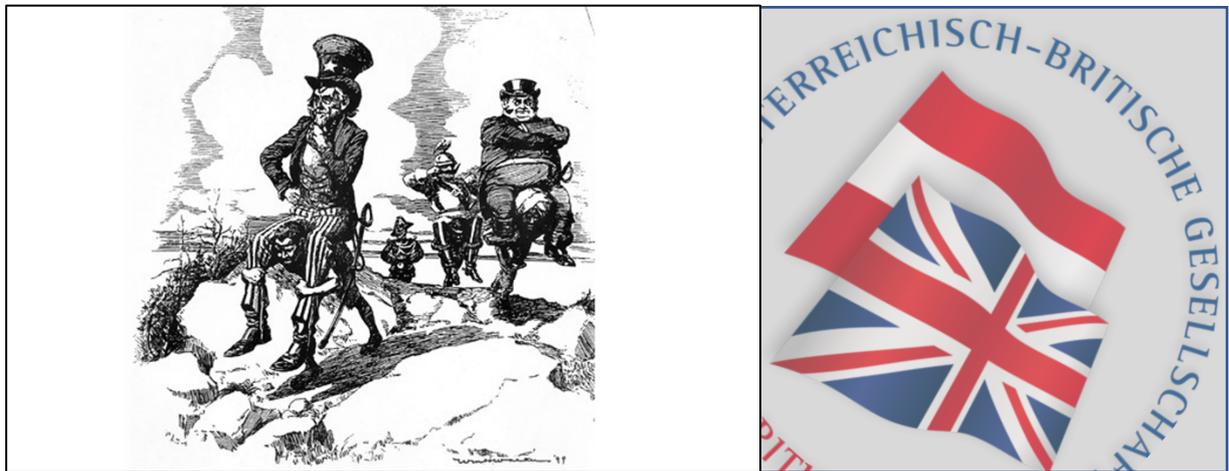


The White Man's Burden

Racism as a Permissible “Dimension”?

For a Better Understanding of the Nature of what was once the Greatest
Regulatory Power for the Far East and West

by Wolfgang Geissler



In the wake of the emotional afterglow of Anglophilia following my stay in England the year before, my father presented me at Christmas 1960 with the book “The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures”, by the English historian **John Robert Seeley** about the growth of the British Empire, (published in German as “Die Ausbreitung Englands”). My father inscribed it for me with the following dedication: “For a better understanding of the nature of what was once the greatest regulatory power for the Far East and West.”

“Ordnungsmacht”

This was the German word he used in his dedication, which in English can also mean “a Power for Order” or “a Force for Order”. Fifteen years after the war, the fascination for “Order and Duty” still prevailed in post-war Austria. “*Ordnung und Pflichterfüllung*” were words widely used in everyday vocabulary. So was the unshakeable belief that only the white European (in those days, he was classified as “Indo-Germanic”) was the carrier and guarantor of culture and civilisation forever burdened by the responsibility to bring it to the less fortunate black or brown “savages”.

“Empire building” continued to have an inspiring ring to it in the years after the war leading up to the 1960s. In grocers’ shops of the 50s and 60s, you could still buy *“Kolonialwaren”*, goods from somebody’s colony. Remember that the Habsburg Monarchy, Austria-Hungary, was a continental European power that had no colonies. In this century, empires fell and disappeared, colonies regained their independence, but only the British Empire, actually gone after World War II, stubbornly clung to its excellent reputation to be a kind of second Roman Empire.

Let me, in this context, introduce **Edward Gibbon’s** (1737-1794) *“The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire”*, a six-volume work. They cover the history, from 98 to 1590, of the Roman Empire, the history of early Christianity and then of the Roman State Church, and the history of Europe, and discusses the decline of the Roman Empire, among other things. He began an ongoing controversy about Christianity’s role, but he gave great weight to other causes of internal decline and attacks from outside the Empire. Like other Enlightenment thinkers and British citizens of the age steeped in institutional anti-Catholicism, Gibbon held in contempt the Middle Ages as a priest-ridden, superstitious Dark Age. It was not until his era, the “Age of Reason”, with its emphasis on rational thought, he believed, that human history could resume its progress.

“We seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind”

Almost a hundred years after Gibbon, **John Robert Seeley** was a professor of modern history at the University of Cambridge from 1869 to 1895. *The Expansion of England* consists of two lectures Seeley delivered at the University in autumn 1881 and spring 1882, which were substantially modified and published in book form eighteen months later. It was written at a time of a rapid expansion of the British Empire. Seeley’s view was that the real function of history was “to exhibit the general tendency of English affairs in such a way as to set us thinking about the future, and divining the destiny which is reserved for us”. History had no existence independent of politics: “Politics and history are only different aspects of the same study”.

Seeley famously remarked that “We seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind”. He wrote that the eighteenth century should be seen as a struggle between European nations for the possession of the New World, rather than a struggle for liberty between the king and the parliament.

Seeley noted that the Dominions could become independent of Britain. However, he also stated that “The other alternative is that England may prove able to do what the United States does so easily, that is, hold together in a federal union countries very remote from each other. In that case England will take rank with Russia and the United States in the first rank of state, measured by population and area, and in a higher rank than the states of the Continent”.

From Trading Company to Military Power

On 22 September 1599, a group of merchants met and stated their intention “to venture in the pretended voyage to the East Indies and the sums that they will adventure”, committing £30,133 (over £4,000,000 in today's money). Two days later, “the Adventurers” reconvened and resolved to apply to the Queen to support the project. Although their first attempt had not been entirely successful, they nonetheless sought the Queen's unofficial approval to continue. They bought ships for their venture and increased their capital to £68,373 (about £9,000,000 today).

Originally chartered as the “*Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East-Indies*”, the Company rose to account for half of the world's trade during the mid-1700s and early 1800s, particularly in essential commodities including cotton, silk, indigo dye, salt, spices, saltpetre, tea, and opium. The Company also ruled the beginnings of the British Empire in India.

The East India Company developed beyond a purely commercial enterprise when war between Britain and France spread to India in the mid-1740s. The Company established military supremacy over rival European trading companies and local rulers.

The Company rule in India effectively began in 1757 after the *Battle of Plassey* and lasted until 1858. The Battle of Plassey was a decisive victory of the *British East India Company* over a much larger force of the **Nawab** (King) of Bengal and his French allies on 23 June 1757, under **Robert Clive's** leadership. The first British victory in South Asia, the battle helped the Company seize control of Bengal. Following the *Indian Rebellion* of 1857 (The Indian Rebellion of 1857 was a major, but ultimately unsuccessful, uprising in India in 1857–58 against the rule of the British East India Company, which functioned as a sovereign power on behalf of the British Crown), the Government of India Act 1858 led to the British Crown assuming direct control of India in the form of the new *British Raj*. (The British Raj was the rule by the British Crown on the Indian subcontinent from 1858 to 1947. The rule is also called Crown rule in India or direct rule in India. *Raj* is Hindi for “Rule”).

Despite frequent government intervention, the Company had recurring problems with its finances. The Company was dissolved in 1874 due to the East India Stock Dividend Redemption Act passed one year earlier, as the Government of India Act had rendered it vestigial, powerless, and obsolete. The official government machinery of the British Raj had assumed its governmental functions and absorbed its armies.

Africa

The British colonised Africa in about 1870. When they heard of Africa's valuable resources such as gold, ivory, salt and more, they did not hesitate to conquer the lands. Another resource in Africa was rubber which was very helpful and used in making many good-selling items like shoes.

The British wanted to control South Africa because it was one of the trade routes to India. However, when gold and diamonds were discovered in the 1860s-1880s, their interest in the region increased, bringing them into conflict with the Boers. The Boers disliked British rule.

The British Empire. A Blue Print for Nazi-German Expansion

Not surprisingly, the German Empire of Wilhelm II and later Nazi Germany watched with awe and envy the British Empire's success. Initially, Nazi foreign policy aimed to create an Anglo-German alliance, so before 1938, Nazi propaganda tended to glorify British institutions, and above all, the British Empire. Joseph Goebbels set out to court them.

Typical of the Nazi admiration for the British Empire was a lengthy series of articles in various German newspapers throughout the mid-1930s praising various aspects of British imperial history and the clear implication that positive parallels could be drawn between *British empire-building in the past and German empire-building in the future*. The esteem in which the British Empire was held can be measured by the fact that the lavish adoration heaped upon Britain's Empire was not matched by similar coverage of other empires both past and present. An example of this sort of coverage was a long article in the "*Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*" newspaper in 1936 extolling the British for "brutally" (*sic*) resolving the Fashoda crisis of 1898 in their favour with no regard for diplomatic niceties.

The Fashoda Incident was the climax of imperial territorial disputes between Britain and France in East Africa, occurring in 1898. The status quo was recognised by an agreement between the two states acknowledging British control over Egypt, while France became the dominant power in Morocco. France had failed in its primary goals.

Another example of Nazi Anglophilia included a series of widely promoted biographies and historical novels commemorating various prominent "**Aryan**" figures from British history such as **Cromwell, Marlborough, Nelson, Rhodes, Wellington, and Raleigh**.

The Nazis praised British "ruthlessness" in building and defending their Empire, which served as a model for the Germans to follow. Above all, the British were admired as an "**Aryan**" people, who with typical "ruthlessness" subjected millions of brown- and black-skinned people to their rule. British rule in India served as a model for how the Germans would rule Russia.

Perhaps more importantly, evaluating the Nazi regime's pro-British feelings in its early years was the prominence given to "*Englandkunde*" (English studies) within German schools and the lavish praise offered to British youth organisations as a model within the Hitler Youth.

"The White Man's Burden"

Rudyard Kipling's famous poem "*The White Man's Burden*" was published in 1899, during a high tide of British and American rhetoric about bringing the blessings of "civilisation and progress" to barbaric non-Western, non-Christian, non-White peoples. In Kipling's often-quoted phrase, this noble mission required the willingness to engage in "*savage wars of peace*."

*“... Take up the White man’s burden-
The savage wars of peace-
Fill full the mouth of Famine
And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
The end for others sought,
Watch Sloth and heathen Folly
Bring all your hope to nought...”*

“I don’t want the Western World to be run by a black man.” Klaus Emmerich

Fast forward to 2008. If you had hoped that the intervening century had managed to obliterate racism, even in Austria, then clearly you were wrong. Alas, it was still deeply “died in the wool”. Unfortunately, the well-known **ORF Foreign Correspondent Klaus Emmerich**, who died on 25 February 2021 at the age of 92, confirmed this.

In an ORF interview in 2008 on the occasion of the US-presidential elections, which **Barack Obama** won, he said: *“I don’t want the Western World to be run by a black man. If you say that it is a racist remark: correct, there is no question at all.”*

“Compared to the current president (George W Bush) it’s easy to appear to be ingenious, talented, charismatic and what not else.” It remains unclear whether the communicative brilliance (Emmerich talks about Obama’s “almost diabolical gift of rhetorical brilliance”) is now endangering the USA and the world as a whole. Emmerich also said in the interview in question that he saw Obama’s election as “an extremely worrying development”, for example, because *“blacks are not yet that far in their political and civilisational development”*. Electing Obama is like as if *“the next Austrian Federal Chancellor would be a Turk”*.

Klaus Emmerich was smart enough to relativise his racist approach. In a “Die Presse” interview, he finally claimed that he was not a racist - his evidence: As a child, he accompanied “a black student friend of mine” on a walk. Racism research knows this strategy: You have an African as a good friend, and therefore, it is impossible to be a racist. In the same interview, however, **Emmerich explained racism as a permissible “dimension”**.

Why Brits Love the Empire So Much, Despite Not Knowing Much About It

“Empireland” author **Sathnam Sanghera** about how historical amnesia has created the perfect conditions for dangerous times (He means Brexit and Covid)

Sathnam Sanghera was about 75 per cent into writing *“Empireland: How Imperialism Shaped Modern Britain”* when **Edward Colston’s** statue was unceremoniously dumped into Bristol Harbour. For an author writing a book about colonialism and the Empire, it was a bit of a shock.

Like most people raised and educated in the UK, Sanghera was taught little about British imperial history – it was only until his final term at Cambridge that he read his first brown (*sic*) author. But the British Empire didn't just reshape the world – it also fundamentally altered the island nation it sprang from, and not always for the better. In a time of Conservative jingoism, his book is a necessary rebuttal to the rhetoric that posits that the Empire was always good and gracious.

It's also, in many places, a gruesome read – with tales of Brits boiling the heads of Xhosa people, tying Indian mutineers to cannons and blasting them to pieces, forcing captured Jamaican rebels to hang each other and embarking on a campaign of mass murder in Tasmania that later became the internationally agreed-upon definition of genocide.

“I've got an epigraph at the start of the book from **Salman Rushdie**,” Sanghera explains in an interview, “saying most of the history happened abroad, so people aren't aware of it. British Empire history is so vast, complicated and morally ambiguous. Compared to World War II, which has a neat beginning and end, and clear morality, Empire's not. It's much easier to see yourself as the country that won World War II.

“One big point I want people to get from the book is, people will say, ‘Oh, we shouldn't use modern ethics to measure the past’. Lots of these things were really controversial at the time. You have **Gladstone** railing against the jingoism of Empire. You have **Queen Victoria** complaining about what **Lord Kitchener** was doing with human remains. You have **Churchill** – Churchill! – saying the **Jallianwala Bagh massacre** [when British troops fired on civilians in Amritsar] was monstrous. People forget [that], at the time, this was really controversial.

“Because it's part of who they are – they need to be proud of Empire, because it explains their heritage and explains who they are. This is why the conversations are so angry. And on the other side, you've got loads of descendants of the colonised, for whom it's the opposite. Colonialism is source of utter shame, and humiliation. And they're never going to move either.”

Epilogue

Has anything changed anything at all? What about the “White Man's Burden”? Is racism still a permissible “dimension”, as Klaus Emmerich insisted 13 years ago? What about **Meghan Markle**, who was recently in the news? Wasn't there the question of baby Archie's skin colour before he was born?

The preoccupation with racism started in Austria with the **Waldheim** discussion. With the death of **Marcus Omofuma**, it expanded to include racism against Africans. (Marcus Omofuma was an asylum seeker from Nigeria who was negligently killed on 1 May 1999 by three policemen during an aeroplane deportation from Austria to Sofia.) However, the internet comments on Emmerich's remarks in 2008 also show that some fellow citizens believe that research on racism should deal with target groups of racism, with Africans, Roma and Jews, rather than racists. That would be the wrong way to go.

Let us have your thoughts and comments!
We are looking forward to receiving them!



About the author

Wolfgang Geissler is a Board Member of the Austro-British Society and a Committee Member of the United Kingdom Citizens in Europe. He has lived and worked for 40 years in the United Kingdom. The opinions expressed in this article reflect in no way the views of the ABS or the UKCA.