



Lecture 2:

# Colonialism and Exceptionalism

# Lecture Outline

- ▶ Recap
- ▶ Colonialism and the British Empire
- ▶ The British Empire and British Exceptionalism
- ▶ Exceptionalism and Covid 19.

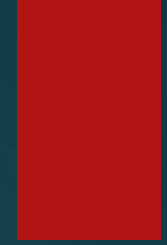
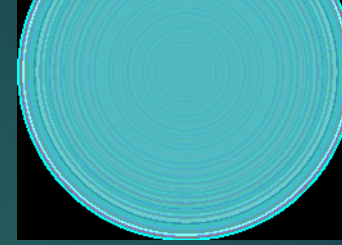
# Recap

▶ Liberty

▶ Equality

▶ Democracy

▶ Property



# Political Principles in the UK

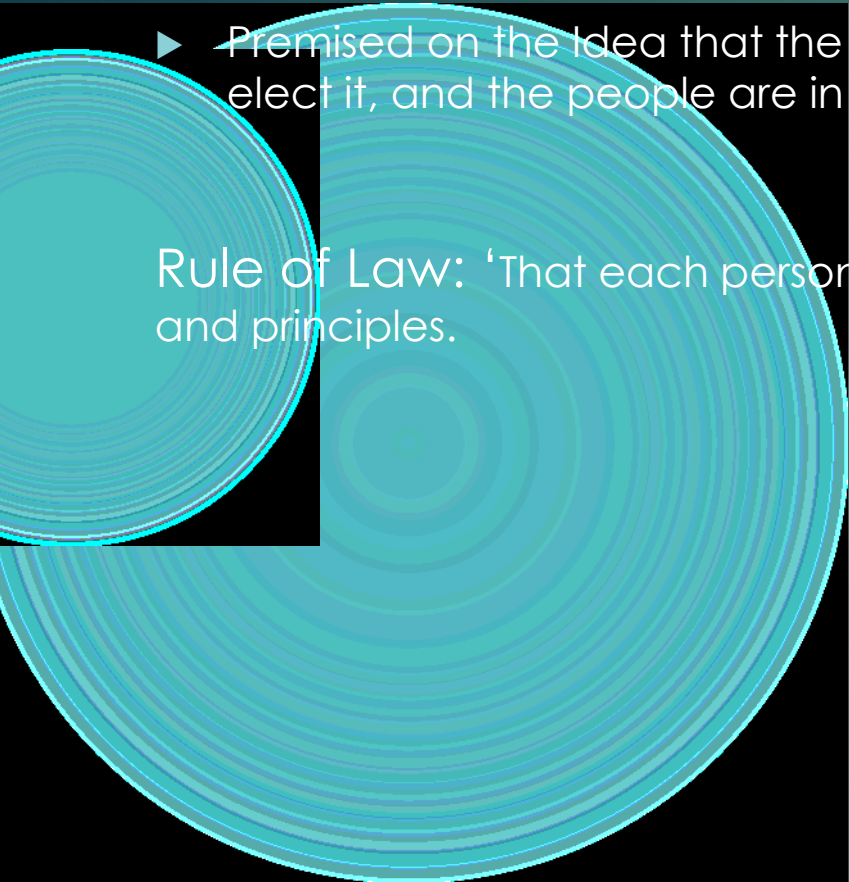


## ▶ AV DICEY- Principles of UK Constitution

Parliamentary Sovereignty: 'Parliament may by statute make or unmake any law, including a law that is violative of international law or that alters a principle of the common law. And the courts are obliged to uphold and enforce it'-AV DICEY

▶ Premised on the Idea that the Government takes its authority from the people who elect it, and the people are in fact Supreme

Rule of Law: 'That each person is equal under the law and subject to the same courts and principles.'



# THE BRITISH EMPIRE

- ▶ 'The Sun Never Sets on the British Empire'. At its peak between 1850 and 1920, the British Empire covered more than 1/3 of the world.

- ▶ India considered 'Jewel in the Crown'. Conquered by the East India company by playing off Indian Rulers against each other, and through gunpowder.

- ▶ When the British first invaded India, India held 20% of the worlds wealth and Britain 3%. This situation was reversed by the mid 1850's.

- ▶ Repeated Famines due to taxation.

# JUSTICE AND EQUALITY IN THE BRITISH EMPIRE

- ▶ 'World Cut in Two based on race'

'Border is the Police Station and the Barracks'- Frantz Fanon

- ▶ Rule of Law, Democracy, and Universal Rights excluded through narratives of Racial Hierarchy.
- ▶ People of Colour portrayed as savage, barbaric, in need of 'civilising'.
- ▶ Race key underlying factor.
- ▶ Scholars like Mill, Locke, explicitly referred to People of Colour as

# The 'Real' British Empire? 'Atrocities in India'

## ▶ **Amritsar Massacre**

- ▶ Heavy machine guns fired into crowd of unarmed Indians, killing over 300 and wounding over 1000.

▶ Colonel Dyer, who ordered the attack, greeted as a hero by many and huge sums of money was raised in his defence

▶ Rudyard Kipling 'Dyer was the man who Saved India'.

## ▶ **Bengal Famine**

- ▶ Indian harvest diverted to British Troops, leading to 2-3 million Indian deaths

- ▶ Churchill: 'I hate Indians. They are a beastly people with a beastly religion.' The famine was 'Their own fault for breeding like rabbits'

## ▶ **'Gulags' in Kenya (1951-1960)**

- ▶ **30,000 Mau Mau 'suspects' held in 'Forced Labour' camps. Regularly tortured into confession.**

- ▶ The horror of some of the so-called Screening Camps now present a state of affairs so deplorable that they should be investigated without delay, so that the ever increasing allegations of inhumanity and disregard of the rights of the African citizen are dealt with and so that the Government will have no reason to be ashamed of the acts which are done in its own name by its own servants

# THE WHITEWASH: EMPIRE IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH CULTURE

## Presentation of British Empire as 'Benevolent' in Film and Literature

➤ **British Period Dramas** portray the Empire as Benevolent, Comfortable, and Romantic, contrary to reality.

➤ **British Popular 'Patriotic Songs'** glorify British Empire.

➤ **Jerusalem:** 'I will not cease from mental fight  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green and pleasant land.'

### **Status of Slavers/Imperialists**

➤ **Cecil Rhodes, 'Rhodes Scholarship':** 'We must find new lands from which we can easily obtain raw materials and at the same time exploit the cheap slave labor that is available from the natives of the colonies'

➤ **Edward Colston:** Famous Slaver. Statue Recently 'torn down' by BLM protestors in Bristol, United Kingdom



# BRITISH EMPIRE AND BRITISH EXCEPTIONALISM

- ▶ You Gov Poll: 44% of Brits approved of the Empire- against only 19% who said it was a bad thing.

- ▶ 33 % of Brits think those who were colonised were 'Better off' being colonised- higher than any other country in Europe.

- ▶ The British Empire and the sense of exceptionalism remain key to British Culture and Society.

# Island Nation: World War 1 and World War 2

- ▶ British Victories in World War 1 and 2 enhanced idea of British Exceptionalism
- ▶ 'Two World Wars and One World Cup!'
- ▶ Churchill/Wartime Nostalgia (13 Films on Churchill Alone)
- ▶ Perception of a 'better, glorious, exceptional' past- A rural, white Britain dominated by White Men.

# Nostalgia in British Popular Literature.

- ▶ Much of Contemporary, Popular British Literature Harkens back to this glorified past.

Rupert Brooke. 'If I should die, think only this of me:  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is for ever England.'

God! I will pack, and take a train, And get me to England once again again!  
For England's the one land I know,  
Where men with splendid hearts may go;

- ▶ 'There is also the ghost of empire haunting its collective imagination, and thus a feeling of lost greatness, a yearning for an imperial past'

Fictional Past: Spoils of Empire shared only among the few; even in Victorian and early Edwardian times, the working class were desperately poor

# Boris Johnson, British exceptionalism, and Covid

Johnson/Brexit elected through the ideal of British Exceptionalism, Nostalgia, and 'Wartime Rhetoric', in the main by those aged 60+

Slogans and Superiority Substance, Science, and Fact.

“ Britain is ready to take off its Clark Kent spectacles and leap into the phone booth and emerge with its cloak flowing as the supercharged champion of Global Free Trade”.

“Sunlit Uplands”

Covid Response Premised on the idea of Britain as a country 'Separate and 'Unique' from Europe: 'Keep Calm and Carry On'.



UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES IS VIOLENCE AGAINST  
OPPRESSION JUSTIFIED?

TO WHAT EXTENT IS VIOLENCE JUSTIFIED AGAINST COLONIALISM?



ARE COLONISED PEOPLE OBLIGED TO TRY NON-VIOLENT MEANS OF  
RESISTANCE BEFORE RESORTING TO VIOLENCE

ARE CIVILIANS WHO BENEFIT FROM COLONIALISM CULPABLE FOR THE  
ACTS OF OPPRESSION UNDERTAKEN IN THEIR NAME AND FOR THEIR  
BENEFIT?

