

# The Legacy of Winston Churchill

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## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá životem bývalého britského premiéra Winstona Churchilla. První polovina práce slouží jako biografie Churchillova života, včetně faktů o jeho dětství a dospívání, manželství a pozdním životě, následovaná fakty o Churchillově cestě k získání statusu politika a premiéra. Práce dále pojednává o stinných stránkách úspěchů Winstona Churchilla s cílem dokázat, že i když je Churchill vnímán jako významná postava britské historie, existují aspekty jeho kariéry, které byly a dodnes jsou vysoce kontroverzní. Tato práce popisuje tři hlavní kontroverze a jejich dopady na odkaz Winstona Churchilla – rasismus, hladomor v Bengálsku a použití chemických zbraní. Při zkoumání těchto témat je zřejmé, že Winston Churchill selhal v některých aspektech zvládnání těchto událostí, které ovlivnily mnohé po celém světě.

Klíčová slova: Winston Churchill, Druhá světová válka, válka, Británie, rasismus, nadřazenost bílé rasy, říše

## **ABSTRACT**

This Bachelor's thesis discusses the life of former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The first half of the thesis serves as a biography of Churchill's life, including facts about his childhood and adolescent years, marriage, and late life, followed by facts about Churchill's path to gaining a status of a politician and a Prime Minister. The thesis then discusses the dark side of Winston Churchill's achievements, with the aim to argue that even though Churchill is perceived as a great figure in British history, there are aspects of his career that were, and still are up to this day, highly controversial. This thesis explains three main controversies and their effects on Winston Churchill's legacy – racism, the Bengal famine, and the use of chemical weapons. By researching those topics, it is clear that Winston Churchill failed in some aspects of handling these events that affected many worldwide.

Keywords: Winston Churchill, World War II, war, Britain, racism, white supremacy, the Empire

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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## INTRODUCTION

This Bachelor's thesis deals with the life of the former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The paper is divided into four main chapters, each focusing on a different period of Churchill's life or an aspect of his career. The thesis aims to serve as a short biography of Winston Churchill's life and to explore a number of controversies that circulate his career. Those controversies affected the legacy he left after himself and are discussed to this day.

As a person eager for knowledge, I always questioned the praise that the significant people in our history were obtaining. For this reason, I became interested in the topic of this thesis. I believe that the negative aspects of historical figures' lives should be also uncovered, with the intention to learn from their mistakes. My goal is thus to describe Churchill's alleged racist and white supremacist views, his decisions and actions during the Bengal famine, and the occasions on which Churchill supported the use of chemical warfare. I believe that those aspects of Churchill's life deserve to be talked about, as it is not only the achievements that should be mentioned.

Winston Churchill is known worldwide for his achievements, especially during the Second World War. He is acknowledged and adored by many, mainly across the United Kingdom. While reading about the praise, a question of whether there are also controversial aspects circulating Winston Churchill arose. There are always aspects of history that are not taught in schools, and for that reason, my interest in Winston Churchill's controversial decisions and actions grew. In this thesis, I am going to explore controversies that tarnished the legacy Churchill created. Those controversies are topics of conversation reoccurring throughout the years, creating questions about whether Winston Churchill is truly worthy of the praise he obtained even after his death.

The first half of this thesis serves as a biography of Churchill's life and career. The second half is then dedicated to the description of controversial aspects of Winston Churchill's decisions regarding several matters.

In the last chapter of this thesis, I aim to explore the question of whether it is even possible to judge historical figures with the standards and knowledge of the 21st century. Naturally, the topics Winston Churchill is criticized for are now understood differently than they have been in the past. With that said, I intend to explore presentism, which deals with this issue.

## 1 LIFE OUTSIDE THE OFFICE

### 1.1 Upbringing and family background

Winston Churchill was born on November 30, 1874. His parents, Lord Randolph Churchill and his mother Jennie Jerome, named their newborn son Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill. His name was given to him to keep the legacy of prominent ancestors from both sides of the parents' families. His first name 'Winston' served as a symbol of appreciation and remembrance regarding Sir Winston Churchill, and his father's brother. His second name, 'Leonard' referred to his grandfather from his mother's side of the family. The child's last names, 'Spencer' and 'Churchill' symbolized the long-lasting relationship between those two families. Their connection had lasted for more than fifty years at the time of the child's birth, and since Winston Churchill appreciated the Spencers, he proudly used their surname while signing.<sup>1</sup> Churchill's parents both came from prominent families, and their marriage was thus an occurrence that was quite ordinary, as for Lord Randolph, whose father was the 7th Duke of Marlborough, and Jennie Jerome, whose father, Leonard Jerome, was a prominent figure in the field of finance and stock markets, which was pleasant regarding the lack of money in the family of Marlboroughs. Lord Randolph was coming from a row of wealthy Dukes, who wasted large amounts of money and sold much of the family's properties and expensive belongings.<sup>2</sup>

Winston S. Churchill was thus a son coming from two well-known and significant families, whose names meant something in terms of honour and status. As a child of parents whose families were always in the higher circles of society, Winston Churchill was a child surrounded with wealth and had promising future ahead of him. But his childhood was not as enjoyable and ideal as people may expect it to be. His parents were not excessively present in his life, which was quite common in aristocratic families of that time, and it was no different, if not even worse, in the case of Winston Churchill. The only sincere love the young boy received was from his nanny Mrs. Everest, who not only took care of him but also served the role of his only partner and supporter. Even after her dismissal, Winston maintained contact with her. Since her only source of money disappeared, Winston provided her with financial support to help her avoid poverty and to get the medical help she needed towards the end of her life.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Roberts, *Churchill: Walking with Destiny* (London: Penguin Books, 2019), 7–8.

<sup>2</sup> Clive Ponting, *Churchill* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), 3–4.

<sup>3</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 5–6.

As a result of their lifestyles, his parents were unable to spend much time with their children. The relationship between them and Winston stayed dysfunctional even after taking him abroad and staying by his side while Winston was ill. Both of them did not like his behaviour and could not properly handle him. They would much rather ignore the issues than handle them and make their relationship with their son better. Even after Winston sent multiple letters from school to his parents, attempting to make them give him attention and show some affection, their attitude towards him did not change. The only person who would show up at school to see him one time was again, Mrs. Everest, and even though his mother came on one occasion too, she would not stay for long. His mother hardly sent him any letters and his father's approach was no different. Even though his father was in the same city where Churchill studied, he would not visit him.<sup>4</sup>

In school, Winston was neglected even more regarding contact with his parents. When he was seven years old, he was sent to a school named St George's at Ascot. This was a boarding school that was supposed to prepare him for the future. But Winston did not last long in this school and soon after he was sent to another institute, now to a school in Brighton. There his behaviour and educational accomplishments grew. Then, thanks to the status of his father, young Winston was accepted to Harrow. It was there that his father noticed his son's enthusiasm towards soldiering. Lord Randolph realized that the best field for Winston would be the army and decided to let Winston become a part of the Army Class.<sup>5</sup> While studying at Harrow, Winston tried his best to get to Sandhurst academy. Even though his first two attempts to get into this school were unsuccessful, he passed the third attempt and in 1893 started studying at Sandhurst. Churchill successfully finished the course a year later, in 1894.<sup>6</sup> In 1895, Churchill matured.<sup>7</sup> Since he was talented in horse riding, he decided to become a part of the cavalry. Thanks to his family name and the help of his mother he got into a cavalry regiment that he had planned to join and became an official member of the 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars.<sup>8</sup> Churchill's decision to become a member of the cavalry was a result of "his own personal preference" that put his mother into a difficult position regarding finances.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 8–10.

<sup>5</sup> Henry Pelling, *Winston Churchill* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 31–33.

<sup>6</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 13–16.

<sup>7</sup> Pelling, *Winston Churchill*, 40.

<sup>8</sup> Pelling, *Winston Churchill*, 41.

<sup>9</sup> Pelling, *Winston Churchill*, 42.

## 1.2 Marriage and family

Winston Churchill decided to propose to a woman named Clementine Hozier in the summer of 1908.<sup>10</sup> Clementine's mother, Blanche, gave birth to her in 1885 on April 1. She was her mother's second daughter.<sup>11</sup> Clementine was also born into a well-established family with famous name. Clementine's father, Henry Hozier, was a colonel with many achievements from battles and was an important figure in many other aspects. But even though Hozier had good reputation while he and Clementine's mother met for the first time, his personality and behaviours regarding business were questionable. However, the relationship of Clementine's parents was not ideal since some major differences were present. Blanche was of a lively spirit and liked to have fun, and her personality overall did not match Hozier's, since their views on Blanche's role as a wife differed a lot. Furthermore, Henry Hozier did not want children, while Blanche wished to have a family. After he and Blanche got married, he spent a lot of time away from home, which gave Blanche a lot of freedom. Overall, their children did not experience much of their parents' company, and after accusations of adultery arose, Hozier decided that separation of him and Blanche was inevitable.<sup>12</sup> Clementine's biological father was George Middleton, with whom his mother had an affair that was the cause of Clementine's birth as well as her sister's. This affair was not the only one Lady Blanche had throughout the years, and after Henry Hozier witnessed his wife cheating, the marriage reached its end and Clementine's parents got divorced. Clementine distanced herself from her mother and openly judged her life decisions. She had suffered from mental health issues all the way through life. Difficult childhood was thus an aspect of life, that her and Winston Churchill shared.<sup>13</sup>

Winston and Clementine met for the first time in 1904. This event had not gone as planned, however. Even though they had the opportunity to speak while being introduced, Churchill froze and thus lost the chance to tell Clementine anything. After that, they did not meet for the next four years. They met for the second time in 1908. This time at a party which both of them considered not attending. In the end, they changed their minds and thus saw each other again. After Clementine and he got talking during the evening, their

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Johnson, *Churchill* (New York: Viking, 2009), 26.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Hough, *Winston and Clementine: The Triumphs and Tragedies of the Churchills* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Hough, *Winston and Clementine*, 4–5.

<sup>13</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 77.

conversation did not seem to end, and it is thus no surprise that he fell for her.<sup>14</sup> In August of 1908, Churchill asked Clementine to marry him.<sup>15</sup>

They got married the same year in Westminster, at St Margaret's Church, and soon after their marriage, in 1909, Winston and Clementine welcomed the first child of their family, Diana. Two years later, in 1911, Randolph Churchill, who was the only boy among the Churchill's children, was born. In 1914, their third child, Sarah, was born. Marigold was their fourth child and was born in 1918. Their last child, Mary, was born in 1922. Winston and Clementine loved being around the children. Churchill was a very loving father, even though the relationship with his kids would sometimes become difficult.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, one of their daughters, Marigold, died in 1921. This was just one from a row of tragic moments the Churchill family went through that year, but definitely the hardest one to process.<sup>17</sup>

Winston and Clementine loved each other very much but often spent holidays individually. Those times of separation were beneficial for their marriage, however, since Churchill was a person hard to be around for a long period of time. Churchill was aware of this fact and thus allowed Clementine to spend time away from him.<sup>18</sup> Times apart were significant for their relationship, as Clementine was also a person whose presence could be exhausting at times. The separation was thus needed because without it, their relationship would have struggled.<sup>19</sup>

### 1.3 Late life

After retiring in 1955 and passing his Prime Minister duties on, his source of keeping his mind busy disappeared. Politics was Churchill's life, and it served as an activity that kept him from getting depressed, as depression was an aspect from his life present since the 1890s. Churchill thus suffered from depression most of his life and tried not to let it affect him by keeping himself occupied through the instant workflow. He officially kept his MP status for few more years even after retiring as Prime Minister, but kept distance and did not participate much in the House of Commons meetings. One thing he did not need to worry about was money, since he had accumulated a vast amount of wealth during his life, plus his

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<sup>14</sup> Roberts, *Churchill*, 117–8.

<sup>15</sup> Roberts, *Churchill*, 123.

<sup>16</sup> Keegan, *Winston Churchill*, 101–2.

<sup>17</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 290.

<sup>18</sup> Roberts, *Churchill*, 125.

<sup>19</sup> Hough, *Winston and Clementine*, 504.

name still meant a lot and remained very beneficial, and his literary works brought in a lot of money too. His works were very popular all around the world and in 1953 led to him being awarded with the Nobel Prize in Literature. One thing he had to worry about was his health, however.<sup>20</sup>

The final decade before Churchill's death was a period of withering away. He wrote, painted, and travelled, but as he was over eighty years old now, the signs of aging had become more visible as he was forgetting more, lost hearing, and was often daydreaming.<sup>21</sup> Churchill gradually began to have difficulties speaking and had to be put on medications to keep his mind functioning. Another aspect of declining health was memory loss. To keep himself busy and not affected by depression, he travelled more, mainly to his friend's villa in France. He travelled with his wife Clementine too, but they still spent a lot of time separated. That affected their relationship at this point in their lives, and Clementine was also struggling with her health which made the situation worse. Not only was his relationship with Clementine not ideal, but almost all of their children had also been through hard times in their lives, and that made the whole family situation even harder to improve. Even after multiple attempts and ways to cope, his depressive states became more severe again. As he had nothing to occupy himself with, he started overthinking his whole career as a politician, which he found unsuccessful in the end. The overall loss of his former lifestyle was the hardest pill to swallow.<sup>22</sup> Almost everything bore him at this point in life, and nothing brought him joy anymore, and his depression deepened even more after he came to the realization that he would soon have to give in to his MP status. Even though his health became better in the following months, and he managed to visit the House of Commons again from time to time. Churchill was now just waiting for the end as he spent his time in bed almost completely without memories of his life, significant events throughout history, and achievements of his.<sup>23</sup>

He had spent his last days in Hyde Park Gate, where he had gone through one last stroke two weeks before his death that left him unconscious until his last day alive. His room would always be decorated with flowers and candles that expressed peoples' love and appreciation for him. Winston Churchill died in January 1965, exactly on the same day his father died, January 24<sup>th</sup>, as Churchill had predicted. The original location that Churchill had in mind

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<sup>20</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 801–4.

<sup>21</sup> Johnson, *Churchill*, 156–7.

<sup>22</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 805–8.

<sup>23</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 812–13.

when thinking about the place of his final rest, was Chartwell, where he had spent a lot of time during his life. But he eventually decided for another place, which would be Bladon, where he would be buried with the rest of his family at the church of St Martin. The Queen herself made sure that Churchill's funeral would be one of the most memorable and magnificent funerals given to a person from a family without a royal background. His funeral had been planned a long time before Churchill's death, and the result was truly a confirmation of that planning. Hundreds of thousands of people from all parts of the United Kingdom travelled to London to see Churchill's casket displayed in Westminster Hall to show Winston Churchill respect and to say their last goodbyes. As a symbol of appreciation, the flags were lowered, and the soldiers wore black armbands. Furthermore, events were cancelled or postponed, and no shop was open in Britain. Churchill's funeral, taking place at St Paul's Cathedral, was attended by the Queen herself, which was an unusual occasion for a ruler to attend a funeral of a person not from the Royal Family. A number of rulers, presidents and prime ministers attended as well. People all around the country were grieving this loss, and hundreds of millions of people all over the world watched his funeral broadcasted live on TV. The whole process was full of honours and salutes, and people proudly expressed their sadness and grief openly on the streets. His coffin was transported from London to Bladon by train, where he would find his final rest.<sup>24</sup> Clementine Churchill and other members of Churchill's family were the only people present in Bladon to express their final goodbyes.<sup>25</sup>

After Winston Churchill's death, Clementine continued to live her life. Her physical health was stable and did not affect her, but she was struggling mentally from time to time. She moved out and sold the houses at Hyde Park and moved to her own place and led a simple life. Gradually she started to lose hearing. In 1968, her eldest son Randolph died leaving Clementine with two children left. Before she died in 1977, her health worsened and resembled her husband's state before his death, but her nature allowed her not to struggle as much as he did. And it was this nature and approach to life that Winston loved about her that she kept until the end of her life.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Roberts, *Churchill*, 961–4.

<sup>25</sup> Hough, *Winston and Clementine*, 501.

<sup>26</sup> Hough, *Winston and Clementine*, 502–4.

## 2 THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

### 2.1 Military years

Churchill's military era started almost immediately after graduating in 1894 as he joined the 4th Hussars. Churchill adapted quickly, as at the beginning of 1895, he got already used to the everyday life in the regiment. But he soon became bored and thus developed a desire for a new experience. Right before the 4th Hussars were to leave for India, Churchill became interested in the current situation in Cuba, and developed a desire to experience war. As he planned to write about the war and document what was happening in Cuba, he perceived this also as an opportunity to make some money and make a name for himself. By contacting the right people, Churchill got a permission and left for Cuba with a fellow soldier, Reginald Barnes, towards the end of 1895. Rebels in Cuba fought to free themselves and become independent, as the Spanish army was trying to put the rebellion to an end.<sup>27</sup>

After a long way from London, Churchill and Barnes got to Havana, where formal introductions were made, their arrival was officially announced, and their desire to get a taste of war became a reality as they joined soldiers on the battlegrounds in November.<sup>28</sup> This was the point where Churchill found himself in a real dangerous situation. He almost got shot after they were attacked, and then for the second time after they moved their camp. The troops faced the rebels, but they fled after being fired on. Soon after that, Churchill left Cuba and came back to Britain.<sup>29</sup>

In the autumn of the following year, 1896, Churchill left for India with the 4th Hussars. His initial feelings about the journey were not positive as nine years were too much of a time, and it did not quite fit his plans for the future. After arriving in India, he soon realized that this life was not to his liking. His duties were not time-consuming and thus left him with a lot of free time that he decided to aim at his education. This also allowed him to shape his perspectives on life.<sup>30</sup> Churchill would soon realize that he aims for something bigger than having a somewhat comfortable life in the regiment. What he looked for was popularity and recognition, not promotions. And he decided that he is going to achieve that recognition through politics.<sup>31</sup> In the end, Churchill's properly spent time in India was worth less than

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<sup>27</sup> John Keegan, *Winston Churchill* (Waterville: Thorndike Press, 2002), 46–8.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (London: Pimlico, 2000), 58.

<sup>29</sup> Keegan, *Winston Churchill*, 49–50.

<sup>30</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 22–3.

<sup>31</sup> Keegan, *Winston Churchill*, 54–5.



two years, not almost nine, as the 4th Hussars spent there. In addition, he managed to arrange a number of visits and expeditions throughout his time spent in India.<sup>32</sup>

His first visit home was granted to him in 1897 when he was in the regiment for only half a year. It was around this time that he expressed his interest in joining the Parliament. But after hearing about a revolt back in India he decided to travel back as he was promised to join an expedition of this sort. Churchill joined as a correspondent but soon after that, he became an officer instead. But his goal was to gain recognition and to help his political career rather than to be acknowledged in the military. In the end he succeeded and gained reputation.<sup>33</sup> Towards the end of 1898, Churchill was determined to no longer be a part of the Army and would officially resign in the spring of 1899.<sup>34</sup> After he returned to England, he did not wait any longer and focused primarily on politics. Churchill seemed like a candidate worthy of taking part in the next by-election and was thus invited to the House of Commons, where a meeting intended to test him was planned. In the end, Churchill decided to seize this opportunity and soon after became a candidate for the Conservative party.<sup>35</sup>

## 2.2 Parliament

Churchill officially became an MP after scoring second in the general election of 1900, when he was a candidate for the Conservative party for the city of Oldham.<sup>36</sup> He remained as the MP for Oldham until 1906, but this would be only the first of a series of political positions Winston Churchill accomplished. His career as a member of Parliament lasted almost seven decades, as he was elected as an MP for different constituencies multiple times during his life and political career.<sup>37</sup>

Even though Churchill was a Conservative candidate at first, he would soon change sides. Churchill's defection to the Liberal party was apparent at the beginning of 1904 as he stood on the Liberal side and voted with them regarding the Free Trade act. By this time, he also decided not to be a candidate in Oldham again and chose to take a seat that would soon become available in Manchester North West. He was officially recognized as a candidate of the Liberals in this constituency towards the end of April 1904.<sup>38</sup> In 1906 a General Election

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<sup>32</sup> Roy Jenkins, *Churchill: A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 23.

<sup>33</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 25–6.

<sup>34</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 31.

<sup>35</sup> Jenkins, *Churchill: A Biography*, 45–6.

<sup>36</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 38.

<sup>37</sup> "Timeline: Churchill Through Time," International Churchill Society, accessed January 19, 2023, <https://winstonchurchill.org/the-life-of-churchill/life/>.

<sup>38</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 53–4.

took place, and Churchill was in the victorious party again. This victory ensured power for the winning party and for Churchill, but by winning he also achieved an opportunity to enter the Cabinet, where he would finally gain the true potential and authority he wanted.<sup>39</sup> His position as an MP in Manchester lasted for only two years, until 1908.<sup>40</sup> During this year, Churchill became a minister. Due to this circumstance he had to be a member of the House of Commons, so re-election was inevitable since it was a requirement as one of the rules he needed to obey.<sup>41</sup> Churchill thus decided to become a Liberal candidate for the city of Dundee and its constituency, where he was victorious and thus elected at the beginning of May 1918.<sup>42</sup>

Churchill would remain in the Dundee constituency until 1922. The election of 1922 did not go in Churchill's favour since he lost and would become a candidate again after more than a year later. It was at this point in time when he returned to the Conservative party. He would become a candidate for the constituency of Epping, which ensured him a very safe position and would help him regarding his future moves. Churchill remained a candidate in this constituency for over three decades.<sup>43</sup> Epping eventually became two separate constituencies – Epping and Woodford. It was at this point that Churchill joined Woodford.<sup>44</sup> He would remain a member of the House of Commons until 1964, which was the year he officially visited this place for the last time.<sup>45</sup>

### 2.3 Ministerial office

The first time Churchill became a member of the Cabinet was in 1908 when he became the President of the Board of Trade. He was offered this office by the current Prime Minister Asquith, who promised promotion of this post at the same time.<sup>46</sup> From the very beginning of his role as a Cabinet Minister he faced problems and demanding workload. The economy was in the state of depression, which caused an increase of the unemployment, and decrease of the wage value. Churchill was responsible for bringing protests caused by the workers who did not agree with the lowering of wages to an end. His first significant responsibility regarding legislation was to handle the circumstances of employees who worked in

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<sup>39</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 57.

<sup>40</sup> Johnson, *Churchill*, 23.

<sup>41</sup> Roberts, *Churchill*, 119.

<sup>42</sup> Roberts, *Churchill*, 121–2.

<sup>43</sup> Johnson, *Churchill*, 23.

<sup>44</sup> Roberts, *Churchill*, 881.

<sup>45</sup> Johnson, *Churchill*, 158.

<sup>46</sup> Pelling, *Winston Churchill*, 109.

extremely poor conditions and for minimum wages, and to assure better life conditions for them. Churchill thus developed the Trade Boards Act, which helped to improve the situation. Labour exchanges were the main aspect of his work as a President of the Board of Trade.<sup>47</sup>

His status would improve even further after he achieved the post of Home Secretary in 1910. That would provide him with much more power to introduce reforms and with the possibility to influence matters more directly. Churchill started to take action right from the moment he was promoted. One of his most prominent responsibilities was to write reports every time the Parliament meeting took place, addressed directly to the king.<sup>48</sup> Among other tasks, the main fields of his interest were the prisons and the police, his responsibility over them, and the Factory Acts' direction. The area of the prison system was one that he especially wanted to change since he had been imprisoned before during the Boer war. One of his goals was thus to establish changes by implementing a prison reform to make the conditions for offenders less cruel.<sup>49</sup> Another bill Churchill implemented in 1911 was the Mines Act. This bill secured more safety for miners in the shafts, as steps were expected to be taken after two tragedies took place the previous year.<sup>50</sup>

In 1911, he became First Lord of the Admiralty, and the British Royal Navy was now under his leadership. He would remain the First Lord until 1915, when he resigned after being forced to do so.<sup>51</sup> In 1915, Churchill was appointed Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.<sup>52</sup> This office did not provide him with any chance to gain a higher status, nor was it even close to his previous positions. But it allowed him to keep his membership in the War Council. Churchill found himself in a position that was for a man of his nature quite frustrating since it did not allow him a chance to speak in the House of Commons even once within the five months he served as the Chancellor.<sup>53</sup> His situation would improve in 1916, after Lloyd George became the new Prime Minister. Since their relationship had been good for a long time, Lloyd George decided to offer Churchill a position in the government. Churchill thus became a Minister of Munitions in 1917 and a member of the government again, which allowed him to have power anew. His efficiency and workaholicism improved the ministry's situation regarding administration and the equipment for the soldiers on the

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<sup>47</sup> Pelling, *Winston Churchill*, 118–19.

<sup>48</sup> Johnson, *Churchill*, 31.

<sup>49</sup> Pelling, *Winston Churchill*, 130–1.

<sup>50</sup> Pelling, *Winston Churchill*, 134.

<sup>51</sup> International Churchill Society, "Timeline."

<sup>52</sup> Pelling, *Winston Churchill*, 645.

<sup>53</sup> Jenkins, *Churchill: A Biography*, 276.

field so they would get access to the exact weaponry they needed. That improved the state of British army rapidly.<sup>54</sup>

Since Churchill was now a member of the War Office, he also gained access to supervise and manage the air, which led to him being appointed the Secretary of State for War and Air in 1919.<sup>55</sup> In addition to that, he was named the Secretary of State for the Colonies just two years later, in 1921.<sup>56</sup> As a Secretary of State for War and Air, Churchill's first duty was to ensure the return of the Britain's troops, since they were located in various parts of the world. This task went hand in hand with the second one ahead of him – trying to save as many financial resources as possible. He was responsible for developing procedures for how to make these objectives realizable.<sup>57</sup> When Churchill moved office again in 1921 to become the Secretary of State for the Colonies, his attention now revolved around the Middle East. The objective was now, among others, to establish economic systems, to lessen Britain's expenses, and to keep Britain's fame and desires alive. To make this objective possible, Churchill created a department focused especially on the Middle East.<sup>58</sup>

Between 1922 and 1924, Churchill lost three times when elections for the Parliament took place, preventing him from changing sides at this point. But this setback was an opportunity for Churchill to focus on something different.<sup>59</sup> He returned to the Cabinet in November of 1924, when he was appointed the Chancellor of the Exchequer. At this time, he also switched party sides again, as he was now a member of the Conservatives.<sup>60</sup>

This position was more than Churchill had expected and the offer to occupy this position exceeded his expectations. The new Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, found Churchill suitable for this office, which was a prestigious one. Churchill had the right knowledge about finances, even though he was quite notorious for the state of his own ones. As a supporter of Free Trade act, he was more than familiar with all the concepts necessary to understand import and export activities, mainly with the exchange rates and taxes regarding trading. Unfortunately, some of his decisions did not bear fruit, as he was unable to find a solution when export became more expensive due to the re-establishment of the Gold Standard and employers had thus trouble to pay employees. The overall state of the economy did not help

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<sup>54</sup> Johnson, *Churchill*, 57–8.

<sup>55</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 405.

<sup>56</sup> Keegan, *Winston Churchill*, 134.

<sup>57</sup> Sara Reguer, *Winston S. Churchill and the Shaping of the Middle East, 1919–1922* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2020), 15, eBook Academic Collection Trial.

<sup>58</sup> Reguer, *Winston S. Churchill and the Shaping of the Middle East, 1919–1922*, 57.

<sup>59</sup> Roberts, *Churchill*, 975.

<sup>60</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 467.

his reputation either, even after implementing measures meant to acknowledge working people. Due to the overall situation, the Conservative party lost in 1929, when the general Election took place.<sup>61</sup> It was obvious that Conservatives would not be supported by the winning Liberal party. The current Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, soon resigned, and Churchill's attempts to find any kind of solution failed, as the Labour party was now in power. Churchill thus did not have any other option than to leave the office, to which he would not return until ten years later, 1939.<sup>62</sup>

Churchill returned to the War Cabinet in September 1939, after Germany attacked Poland. When Britain officially entered the second World War few days later, he was offered the position of First Lord of the Admiralty by Prime Minister Chamberlain himself and joined the office the same day he got the offer.<sup>63</sup> Churchill changed office again soon after joining the Admiralty, as he became the Minister of Defence in 1940, the same year he was appointed the Prime Minister of Great Britain. Both of the offices he achieved would last until July of 1945.<sup>64</sup> Even though Churchill was not liked by many around him in the higher positions, the people of Britain gave him their trust in war matters as they believed that someone as experienced as him in the aspect of war, should be the leader.<sup>65</sup> That Churchill should be the next Prime Minister, suggested the current Prime Minister Chamberlain himself. Churchill was thus directly appointed by the king. But it was mainly his name and public praise that helped him achieve both positions.<sup>66</sup>

Churchill resigned in 1945 but would be re-appointed in both offices again in 1951. He kept the Minister of Defence post only for a short time, as he renounced the office in 1952.<sup>67</sup> The end of his career as a Prime Minister was not so favourable. He began to fail at basic tasks regarding his usual line of work. What kept him from resigning sooner was the illness of the next candidate. Churchill tried his best to keep his status through contacts but failed in the end. He officially resigned as Prime Minister in 1955, leaving his office for the new Prime Minister Eden.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Keegan, *Winston Churchill*, 147–150.

<sup>62</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 327–8.

<sup>63</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 408–9.

<sup>64</sup> Johnson, *Churchill*, 109.

<sup>65</sup> Max Hastings, *Winston's War: Churchill, 1940–1945* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 12.

<sup>66</sup> Hastings, *Winston's War*, 13.

<sup>67</sup> Pelling, *Winston Churchill*, 645.

<sup>68</sup> Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900–2000* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 246.

## 2.4 Respected politician

In 1940, Churchill was appointed the Leader of the Conservative Party, after the previous leader Chamberlain resigned due to cancer.<sup>69</sup> After five years, the general election took place in 1945, and Churchill's post as a Conservative Party leader ended as he lost in the election and thus lost the office position, which was to a surprise for many all around the world.<sup>70</sup> This loss led to another appointment, however, now to a post as the Leader of the Opposition.<sup>71</sup>

In 1959, Winston Churchill gained the title of the Father of the House, since even though his membership in the House of Commons had been interrupted due to him being out of the office in the past, he still remained a member who served the most days in a row in the House of Commons.<sup>72</sup> During 1959, the Conservatives let Churchill be a candidate again, since he was eager to keep his MP status for some more time. This was a very last connection Churchill would have with the world of politics.<sup>73</sup> Churchill continued to visit the House of Commons up until July 1964.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, 194.

<sup>70</sup> Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, 216.

<sup>71</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 855.

<sup>72</sup> Roberts, *Churchill*, 957.

<sup>73</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 810.

<sup>74</sup> Jenkins, *Churchill: A Biography*, 911.

### 3 THE DARK SIDE OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS

Among the number of achievements and great speeches, there are also some controversial topics that circulate around Churchill. In this chapter, I intend to talk about selected aspects of Churchill's career that are, by today's standards, perceived as highly controversial. The times have changed, and so did the view of many on Winston Churchill and the legacy he is famous for. The most prominent downfalls of his leadership that are going to be mentioned are *racism* and racial views and comments that go hand in hand with so-called *white supremacy*, his actions in India regarding the Bengal famine, and the topic of chemical weapons and Churchill's fondness of using them. I believe, that even though these particular topics had been discussed before, they deserve a revision and a fresh look. Furthermore, the legacy of Winston Churchill's actions as a politician and a leader during World War II should be examined also from different points of view. For that reason, I am going to explore the most controversial aspects of his career and introduce many examples of his actions that are nowadays considered wrong and questionable.

#### 3.1 Racism

Before proceeding, it is important to include definitions of the terms that are going to be mentioned frequently throughout the chapter. The definition of *racism* I am going to work with is that racism is "the belief that humans may be divided into separate and exclusive biological entities called "races"; that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and traits of personality, intellect, morality, and other cultural and behavioral features; and that some races are innately superior to others."<sup>75</sup> The term *white supremacy* would be then defined as "beliefs and ideas purporting natural superiority of the lighter-skinned, or "white," human races over other racial groups."<sup>76</sup>

The first hint of Churchill's desire to become a great and powerful politician can be tracked all the way to his days at Sandhurst, where he was introduced to the local habits of all the young men who he was surrounded by. Churchill experienced an outburst of political desire. When he found out that he was to spend time in India, he seized the opportunity to make a future for himself by being a soldier reporting from the battlefield. At the same time, he recognized his lack of knowledge stemming from not attending the university and decided

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<sup>75</sup> Audrey Smedley, "racism," Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified April 15, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/racism>.

<sup>76</sup> J. Philip Jenkins, "white supremacy," Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified April 18, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/white-supremacy>.

to self-educate in his free time while commissioning in India.<sup>77</sup> The time spent in India gave Churchill the opportunity to think and come to terms with what his opinions and views are. His white supremacy beliefs formed as well, as he was a strong believer of superiority held by nations of white skin. Churchill saw millions of Indians being ruled by a small number of British natives, which awakened his perception of Great Britain as a great and powerful nation further fuelled by the Queen becoming the Empress, and the unstoppable growth of Britain that made its status and position as a country even more stable.<sup>78</sup> Churchill was a true imperialist, but he believed in a specific type of imperialism. He understood the Empire “as a piece of economic machinery,” but also “as a Commonwealth of self-governing white dominations,” as he himself was present at the creation of Irish and South African autonomy. His enthusiasm for the Empire was rooted in its superiority over African and Asian people, and over Egypt and India.<sup>79</sup>

Churchill’s racial attitudes are widely based on his comments and observations of the way he spoke to people of colour. On one occasion, when Churchill visited Egypt’s capital Cairo to attend a conference in 1921<sup>80</sup>, his ways of talking to the Arabs were quite different than his usual way of speaking when talking to people of white skin, as it is reported that Churchill “talked impatiently to Arab deputations, as though his hearers were boys or minors who understood nothing”<sup>81</sup> suggesting that he saw them as inferior to ones like him. Churchill truly had his own hierarchy of races established with the white European population highest in the ranking with Indian and Arabian people below them, followed with African population at the lowest level.<sup>82</sup> He simply saw them as of a subordinate race.

Churchill believed in the white supremacy without ever thinking about its repercussions and shortcomings. On the other hand, he recognized that races other than the white one were also worthy of attention. But it has to be said that even though he believed in equality to some extent, he also believed that in terms of law, “some racial groups were ‘more equal’ than others.” The equality he preferred was the one of educated and modern people.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Paul Addison, “The Political Beliefs of Winston Churchill,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 30 (1980): 28–9.

<sup>78</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 23.

<sup>79</sup> Addison, “The Political Beliefs of Winston Churchill,” 38–9.

<sup>80</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 252.

<sup>81</sup> J. M. N. Jeffries, *Palestine: The Reality* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1939), 456.

<sup>82</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 71.

<sup>83</sup> Richard Toye, *Churchill’s Empire: The World that Made Him and the World He Made* (London: Macmillan, 2010), 112.



On the other hand, there are also different opinions. “Although he used language that today would shock even the least politically correct, Churchill believed in the notion of civilizational progress and potential,”<sup>84</sup> says Andrew Roberts in his book *Churchill: Walking with Destiny*. Believing in forward movement and the capability of ‘lower’ races may be respect-worthy, but what should not be forgotten is the behaviour and the words of a man who symbolized better future. Even though Churchill’s intentions might have been pure, his actions and words were often ruthless, as showed in this chapter.

There are many aspects connected with racism that Churchill was not familiar with, says Paul Addison in his article *The Political Beliefs of Winston Churchill*, followed by saying that he “had no theory of race as a biological entity.” Addison says in his article that it is no surprise that Churchill saw the British population as superior, since white people from Europe perceived people of other races as subordinate. It was imperialism that backed those views.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, he says that the views of Churchill’s were quite common among people of the same generation, but Churchill’s views were still of “special salience and force.” Churchill simply “believed in the civilizing mission of the British race.”<sup>86</sup>

When in 1942 black soldiers arrived in Britain, it was apparent that British people had preconceived ideas not only about black people but about people of other races and beliefs as well. It is thus no surprise that people of different race faced discrimination in different areas throughout Britain.<sup>87</sup>

It was also Gandhi, whom Churchill attacked and called names on many occasions. This hatred was coming from the fact that Churchill believed that Gandhi held greater power than he did, but that was indeed false.<sup>88</sup> One of his speeches in particular did not help Churchill’s reputation as his words did not sit well even with some members of the Conservative party who tried to distance themselves from such beliefs.<sup>89</sup> Those views that Churchill possessed “were not necessarily popular even with white opinion”<sup>90</sup> which says a lot about the severity of his comments regarding Gandhi.

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<sup>84</sup> Roberts, *Churchill*, 114.

<sup>85</sup> Addison, “The Political Beliefs of Winston Churchill,” 39.

<sup>86</sup> Addison, “The Political Beliefs of Winston Churchill,” 40.

<sup>87</sup> David Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the International History of the 1940s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 202.

<sup>88</sup> Arthur Herman, *Gandhi & Churchill: The Epic Rivalry That Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age*, (New York: Bantam Books, 2008), 359–60.

<sup>89</sup> Warren Dockter, *Churchill and the Islamic World: Orientalism, Empire and Diplomacy in the Middle East*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 204.

<sup>90</sup> Toye, *Churchill’s Empire: The World that Made Him and the World He Made*, 177.

The feelings Churchill held towards India were also coming from his deeply rooted beliefs regarding the British Empire, which was a symbol of his young years that he was grasping on and could not let go of. The idea of the empire falling apart was something he was refusing to accept or even watch from distance. It was a creation of many powerful men, and he was unable to see it in hands of men who he perceived as undeserving of such heritage. It was something that he felt responsible for, and he felt like he himself was deserving of taking care of the future of the Empire.<sup>91</sup>

Churchill's love for Empire was just too strong. It was a reason for which he wanted to join politics in the first place. He did everything in his power to ensure the growth and status of The British Empire, which was also the reason why he despised Germany for many years. It was due to his love for the Empire that he refused to accept India's independence in 1947. Churchill was even advised to change his opinions regarding India by Lord Irwin, who asked him to have a conversation with Indians in an effort to make Churchill's opinions more current. But Churchill refused, keeping his opinions and comments about India.<sup>92</sup> It was believed by many around him that the main force of his hatred was his inability to accept democracy in any other state than Britain, and the democracy of a fraction of other races he perceived as superior. India was the perfect example of this view. As Gandhi decided to turn to non-violence, Churchill was furious and later on said that he hates people of India and compared them to beasts.<sup>93</sup> With that said, Churchill's attitudes, whether conscious or unconscious, resonate with racism, and examples above serve as evidence.

Churchill was of the opinion that in order to ensure the authority of Great Britain in the world, the Empire had to be properly preserved and taken care of. For that reason, he supported a policy aimed against any pursuit of independence coming from any nation under the British rule. Churchill was a true white supremacist and for that reason, "he simply never understood why other nations should want to rule themselves." He was convinced that Britain had every right to be the authority above the nations that were part of the Empire. And further on, that "the British, as a civilised white race, were far better able to govern than other lesser breeds."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> John Charmley, *Churchill: The End of Glory – A Political Biography* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993), 275.

<sup>92</sup> Adam Young, "The Real Churchill," Mises Institute, February 27, 2004, <https://mises.org/library/real-churchill>.

<sup>93</sup> Johann Hari, "Not his finest hour: The dark side of Winston Churchill," Independent, October 28, 2010, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/not-his-finest-hour-the-dark-side-of-winston-churchill-2118317.html>.

<sup>94</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 249–50.

### 3.2 Bengal famine

During autumn of 1942, parts of Bengal were hit by a cyclone destroying the rice that was planted and killing many as it progressed. Rice that was to be grown in the following months was eaten, and as the temperatures in the following May of 1943 were high, it reduced the amount of rice even more.<sup>95</sup> Since the monsoons were especially weak before the famine and the amount of harvested crops declined, food became more expensive. In addition, rice could not be imported anymore since the supply from Burma was gone.<sup>96</sup>

Even though help was requested, India's government did not offer any explanation as to why no support will be delivered to Bengal and stating that Bengal's rice stock was sufficient for them.<sup>97</sup> Churchill, now the Prime Minister, was urged to help, but he refused any plea as ships were needed in other places and thus almost no support was sent to the Bengal.<sup>98</sup> His reaction to the pleas were exactly what one would have expected to him, as he stated that "despite the famine, Indians would continue to breed 'like rabbits'."<sup>99</sup> So even in a time of need Churchill seems to be unable to let go of his attitudes towards the Indians.

The reason why Churchill did not want to support food shipping to India at first was the use of ships for war matters, which was of higher importance at that time.<sup>100</sup> Since the World War II was in a full swing, it seemed that those issues were nothing more than a distraction to Churchill, as he was preoccupied with war.<sup>101</sup> The reality behind the famine is the fact that the powerful nations that could help were short on finances due to paying the shipping toll between 1943 and 1944. Transportation across the Atlantic, "military shipping necessities", and "amphibious attack" were considered of more importance than the necessity to end the famine the Bengalis were experiencing.<sup>102</sup>

Fortunately, as the situation was truly grasped by the War Cabinet in September of 1943, the support in the form of grain was sent, as the cabinet and also Churchill tried to make the situation in Bengal bearable without further extension of the suffering, while also still fully

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<sup>95</sup> Herman, *Gandhi & Churchill: The Epic Rivalry That Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age*, 512.

<sup>96</sup> Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire 1781–1997* (London: Vintage Books, 2008), 397.

<sup>97</sup> Madhusree Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and The Ravaging of India During World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 128.

<sup>98</sup> Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire 1781–1997*, 399.

<sup>99</sup> Wm. Roger Louis, *In the name of God, Go!: Leo Amery and the British Empire in the age of Churchill*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 173.

<sup>100</sup> Roberts, *Churchill*, 788.

<sup>101</sup> Toye, *Churchill's Empire*, 234.

<sup>102</sup> Roberts, *Churchill*, 788.

focusing on the war.<sup>103</sup> Even though the government was unable to act quickly enough at the beginning of the catastrophe, another wave of hunger did not come.<sup>104</sup> But around three million of Indians died, due to illnesses and the lack of food that were results of the famine.<sup>105</sup>

As Richard Toye says in his book *Churchill's Empire: The World that Made Him and the World He Made*, "it seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that maladministration made the consequences worse" followed by saying that "Churchill's own reaction was grossly inept and, it is tempting to add, callous." He also states that "in the face of the famine, the British authorities were appallingly slow to act."<sup>106</sup> What Winston Churchill's true intentions were is impossible to tell. But what can be said is that a more serious approach to the matter could have been taken.

### 3.3 Chemical weapons

As John Keegan states in his book *The First World War*, this event was "tragic and unnecessary." Before the war, a series of incidents that started the war occurred. This series, however, was not impossible to be stopped, if "prudence or common goodwill found a voice," says Keegan. The tragic aspect than reflects millions of lives lost, as a result of the battles, the mental toll it left on millions of others, or the destruction of culture. The First World War created "a legacy of political rancour and racial hatred" that were the initial foundation for the outbreak of the Second World War, which was far more catastrophic and "the direct outcome of the First."<sup>107</sup> Due to its proportions, it is considered to be one of the largest catastrophes that in the history of humanity. The World War II caused death of millions, not only the deaths of soldiers, but of ordinary people as well. Many of those victims are left nameless to this day, and the tragic fate of those people "is the bitter legacy of the war."<sup>108</sup> Many aspects of World War I and War II were identical, including the leaders. Among those names, there was also British First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, who served in this post both in 1914 and 1939.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Arthur Herman, "Absent Churchill, Bengal's Famine Would Have Been Worse," The Churchill Project – Hillsdale College, October 13, 2017, <https://winstonchurchill.hillsdale.edu/churchills-secret-war-bengal-famine-1943/>.

<sup>104</sup> Toye, *Churchill's Empire*, 236.

<sup>105</sup> Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire 1781–1997*, 399.

<sup>106</sup> Toye, *Churchill's Empire*, 235.

<sup>107</sup> John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 3.

<sup>108</sup> Martin Gilbert, *The Second World War: A Complete History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1989), 1.

<sup>109</sup> Keegan, *The First World War*, 9.

With the rise of the use of airplanes during the World War I, Britain became a big manufacturer of them, soon building more than 3,500 aircraft monthly with more development to come. But Churchill's focus was aimed at chemical warfare which became a field he grew very enthusiastic towards. He suggested using chemical warfare extensively, which would involve the use of bombs filled with gas that would be carried by the airplanes. Churchill was prepared to extend the usage even further, and when limitations of the gas usage were proposed in 1918, he was strongly unsupportive of the idea.<sup>110</sup> While he was trying to constraint Germany's progress, he advocated further manufacturing of chemical weapons. Now, of shells filled with mustard gas, that were a month later used regularly on the battlefield.<sup>111</sup> When Britain made any kind of move forward, Churchill would take the opportunity to check the state and usage of the weaponry, including the gas, to see whether it was being used in the right ways.<sup>112</sup> The end of war in 1918 surprised Churchill. In April, he contacted the War Cabinet and suggested that a campaign that was to be held in 1919 "should be dominated by high-technology warfare – the widespread deployment of tanks, large-scale bombing attacks on German civilians and the mass use of chemical warfare."<sup>113</sup>

When Churchill took his place in the War Office at the beginning of 1919, he was prepared to take steps against Bolsheviks to bring their regime down.<sup>114</sup> Churchill finally got the chance to attack after it was officially decided that the British soldiers were to be withdrawn from Russia.<sup>115</sup> In April, the troops started moving and were prepared to withdraw from the areas. Churchill again suggested that if they forged ahead, the soldiers should use any kind of weapon, which would also mean the chemical ones, as he supported the use of new gas which was developed in April of that year. Later on, when Churchill was to defend himself because of the use of this weapon, his explanation was simple, as he claimed that the Soviets also possessed the gas, which was indeed never proven to be true.<sup>116</sup>

Churchill's enthusiasm towards the use of mustard gas showed in 1919 again, as he insisted on it being used against Afghans after they tried to conquer India, which was under the rule of Britain at that time. The gas was not used in the end, after protests arose. It was

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<sup>110</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 212.

<sup>111</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 390.

<sup>112</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, 396.

<sup>113</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 212.

<sup>114</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 230.

<sup>115</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 236.

<sup>116</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 237.

said that the use could take on a role of an example that would be threatening for the Muslims and India as a whole. To suppress the invasion, common bombs were used as a substitute.<sup>117</sup>

When the British operated in Iraq during 1920, the use of tear gas was officially granted as it was the state of emergency at the moment. Churchill himself decided of the use, without even discussing or mentioning the fact to his War Office partners, because the possibility of them rejecting this move was something Churchill wanted to avoid.<sup>118</sup>

Churchill gave a permission to use the gas again in 1920, as Mesopotamia was occupied by the Iraqi. He was forced to deploy the shells from Egypt though, since no bombs were accessible at the moment as they were provided to Russia. Like before, the gas was not used, and common bombs were used instead.<sup>119</sup> As he was trying to reduce costs, he developed an enthusiasm towards the use of the Royal Air Force. In 1921 he succeeded in his plea regarding the control over Mesopotamia with the use of RAF, among other means that would ensure the control. Churchill, again, supported the usage of chemical weapons by the aircraft in an effort to gain control. Churchill did not support using the RAF for shooting civilians, but when the use of gas was in question, he had no objections. Using it against the people of colour was something that Churchill perceived as and valid and merciful. But the mustard gas is a very dangerous and pain inducing weapon, as its victims' skin is covered in blisters after they come into contact with it, they may become blind for a time period and a number of the affected victims dies.<sup>120</sup> The opinion Churchill had about the use of chemical weapons was that it "was not only highly effective against uncivilised natives" but "more humane" as well. He was persistent in his enthusiasm regarding the use of chemical warfare towards the people of colour. In 1927 he expressed his support to the current Secretary of State for War for the dispatch of chemical weapons, that were to be used in Shanghai.<sup>121</sup>

Even though chemical warfare was prohibited in 1925, as the Geneva Protocol came into force, Churchill did not seem to pay this ban much attention, and he was not the only one, as Mussolini continued to use chemical warfare further during his own war campaign around the year 1935.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Anthony Tucker-Jones, "Churchill and Mustard Gas: Churchill was an enthusiastic proponent of using the deadly chemical weapon," *Aspects of History*, accessed March 29, 2023. <https://aspectsofhistory.com/churchill-and-mustard-gas/>.

<sup>118</sup> R. M. Douglas, "Did Britain Use Chemical Weapons in Mandatory Iraq?" *The Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 4 (December 2009): 874, <https://doi.org/10.1086/605488>.

<sup>119</sup> Tucker-Jones, "Churchill and Mustard Gas."

<sup>120</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 257.

<sup>121</sup> Ponting, *Churchill*, 258.

<sup>122</sup> Tucker-Jones, "Churchill and Mustard Gas."

If the invasion from Germany was to happen during World War II, Churchill was not afraid to use mustard gas even in Great Britain.<sup>123</sup> While he was doing everything he could to ensure that Britain would withhold Germany's invasion, he was prepared to use chemical warfare as well.<sup>124</sup> He himself expressed fears of the chemical warfare being used by Adolf Hitler, and thus insisted on the use of gas masks.<sup>125</sup> During this time, Germany was known to focus on the development of rockets. The possibility of them launching such a dangerous weapon would be fatal, as Germany owned many of those rockets. Churchill acted as expected of him, saying that if Germany attacked with those rockets, "he was prepared, after consultation with the United States and the USSR, to threaten the enemy with large-scale gas attacks in retaliation, should such a course appear profitable'."<sup>126</sup>

Another possibility of using gas against Germany occurred while the Battle of Normandy took place. As the Soviet troops succeeded in operations at Minsk and the Baltics area, Adolf Hitler decided to use his bombs and to send them on London, which triggered debates about using chemical warfare. This proposal was not granted in the end.<sup>127</sup>

Chemical warfare did not cause the death of many soldiers during the First World War, however, it caused "psychological damage" and as many were exposed to it, they suffered aftermath regarding their health. "Understanding the origins of chemical warfare during World War I and its emergence during that conflict as a physical and psychological threat to both military and civilian populations can provide historical insight into possible contemporary medical responses to this enduring technologically pervasive threat."<sup>128</sup> It was not only the use of chemical warfare, but also its manufacturing that was a risk regarding health.<sup>129</sup>

When the World War II started, Britain possessed 500 tons of mustard gas. Towards the end of the war, the amount of the gas reached 41,000 tons, as to Churchill's credit. Churchill believed that its use was more merciful, as not more than ten percent of the victims died due to its effects.<sup>130</sup> His enthusiasm towards its usage is very striking, and the fact that he suggested using it against people of colour supports his racial views, as explored above.

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<sup>123</sup> Tucker-Jones, "Churchill and Mustard Gas."

<sup>124</sup> Hastings, *Winston's War*, 69.

<sup>125</sup> Hastings, *Winston's War*, 70.

<sup>126</sup> Gilbert, *The Second World War: A Complete History*, 557.

<sup>127</sup> Fenby, *Alliance*, 285.

<sup>128</sup> Gerard J. Fitzgerald, "Chemical Warfare and Medical Response During World War I," *American Journal of Public Health* 98, no. 4 (April 2008): 612, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2007.11930>.

<sup>129</sup> Fitzgerald, "Chemical Warfare," 614.

<sup>130</sup> Tucker-Jones, "Churchill and Mustard Gas."

## 4 CHURCHILL'S LEGACY

### 4.1 The perception of Winston Churchill

While researching this topic, a number of questions occurred. Can we even compare the approach to race that people had in the past with the one we have today? Is it possible to judge the racial views people in the past had with today's standards? Do today's standards prevent us from looking at the past events without judgement, since we now have different opinions? "Judging the past through the lens of the present might leave the world with no heroes at all," writes Yogita Limaye in her article *Churchill's legacy leaves Indians questioning his hero status*.<sup>131</sup> And for that reason, I started to explore this problematic.

David Hackett Fischer explains presentism as a fallacy "in which the antecedent in a narrative is falsified by being defined or interpreted in terms of the consequent."<sup>132</sup> He also mentions in his book that history "can serve to clarify contexts in which contemporary problems exist—not by a presentist method of projecting our own ideas into the past but rather as a genuinely empirical discipline, which is conducted with as much objectivity and historicity as is humanly possible."<sup>133</sup> Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the term as "an attitude toward the past dominated by present-day attitudes and experiences."<sup>134</sup> In other words, it is judging past events with today's eyes. With that said, we should try to be as objective as possible when exploring past events.

As I personally found out, it is difficult to judge Churchill's comments and approach to people of colour by today's standards, but his views should not be regarded as unimportant even though he lived in a different time period. I am convinced that throughout the history, there was not a prominent figure without aspects of their career that would not be considered controversial in today's view, and Churchill is definitely one of those figures. From the hurtful comments about the people of colour that were demonstrated in previous chapter all the way up to the using chemical warfare during World War I and World War II, the number of erroneous moves is high as was explored in previous chapters of this thesis.

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<sup>131</sup> Yogita Limaye, "Churchill's legacy leaves Indians questioning his hero status," BBC News, July 21, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-53405121>.

<sup>132</sup> David Hackett Fischer. *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1970), 135.

<sup>133</sup> Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought*, 315.

<sup>134</sup> "presentism," Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, accessed April 19, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/presentism>.



Thanks to opposing the Nazis during 1930s, and to assisting the Allies to become victorious in the World War II, Winston Churchill is remembered as a famous figure even after decades. “Yet in spite of his continuing fame, few people are aware of the full range of his achievements, or, indeed, the many controversial aspects of his career, which included a number of spectacular political and military failures.” It is historians who are familiar with all the aspects of Churchill’s career that were crucial for his evolution as a person and a politician. But those facts are unable of reaching the public since the public’s knowledge is affected by the way the media present those facts to them. In addition, the media often pay attention only to certain topics that overshadow the rest. The career of Churchill’s is complicated and complex, which makes it hard to become fully familiar with it. During his career, he was appointed many crucial positions and his focus “ranged across imperial and foreign policy, and yet he also forged a significant but often neglected record as one of the godfathers of the welfare state.” During World War I and World War II, Churchill was responsible for many crucial decisions which gave him a chance to become very influential regarding “military affairs as well as political ones.” But what allowed him to influence the perception of him was the fact that he was also an author. If we truly want to comprehend him, it is important to realize that “much of the relevant evidence was shaped by himself.”<sup>135</sup>

To research Churchill’s life, it is not only his book *Life* that should be studied. This book serves as a basis for the research of many, but it is not the only source that should be acknowledged. An extensive variety of texts exist, but it must be said that those texts usually draw from the ones Churchill wrote. His texts are nowadays archived and were converted into a digital form. In addition, certain schools in Britain and the United States now have unrestricted access to them. As a result, those texts can now be accessed by a much bigger range of people and not only by fraction of researchers who focused on Churchill.<sup>136</sup>

Stating that Churchill did not serve as one of the biggest contributors of the victory during the Second World War, could be considered as injustice towards him. But naturally, not every decision he made was a success. Churchill can be judged for several failures regarding the military field. Among other examples of those failures is also his “profoundly negative approach to political reform in India,” and the inability to comprehend the seriousness of famine in Bengal.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Richard Toye, ed., *Winston Churchill: Politics, Strategy and Statecraft* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 1–2, eBook Academic Collection Trial.

<sup>136</sup> Toye, *Winston Churchill: Politics, Strategy and Statecraft*, 10.

<sup>137</sup> Toye, *Winston Churchill: Politics, Strategy and Statecraft*, 7.

As Gordon K. Lewis says in his article *On the Character and Achievement of Sir Winston Churchill* from 1957, Churchill was a symbol of “characteristics that have become known as English since the Henrican Reformation.” He was a person of vast knowledge that allowed him to achieve a number of very prestigious offices. Lewis also states that Churchill was an example of “*homo anglicanus*.” Among other characteristics, someone who certainly held preconceived ideas and with views that were often faulty, but also someone who appreciated the ability to follow own beliefs.<sup>138</sup> Lewis argues that Churchill held generosity which was the origin of him becoming a great politician, following with the fact that Churchill always defended the interests of people.<sup>139</sup> This statement is questionable however, after taking into account his approaches to people of colour, which have been explored in this thesis. As it was explored just now, the views on Churchill’s career differ. And it is no surprise that there are defenders but also attackers of his career.

But there are also people who seek the truth since they refuse to blindly accept the fact that many prominent people from our history did only right things. When the Black Lives Matter protests took place in June of 2020, Churchill’s statue in London was vandalized. The protesters also demanded that more research should be done on the history of race and the empire. But also, on the figures to whom sculptures were built in our cities.<sup>140</sup> This incident can thus be recognized as a reminder that his past comments about people of colour were still not forgotten.

In an article by Yogita Limaye, she explains that as she matured and was more educated on India as a former colony, she realized that views on Winston Churchill in India are very contradictory. Not only views on Churchill, but on the British authority as well. She mentions that some are of the opinion that Britain was a source of development, others, on the other hand, protested against the British rule. She continues with saying that even though people were angry, “anything western, anything done or said by people who were white-skinned, was perceived as superior in the India” where she was raised. But she also mentions that due to the British influence, people were gradually less self-assured. However, since India became independent, much had gone through changes, as for example the opinions and

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<sup>138</sup> Gordon K. Lewis, “On the Character and Achievement of Sir Winston Churchill.” *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science / Revue canadienne d’Economie et de Science politique* 23, no. 2 (May 1957): 173, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/138683>

<sup>139</sup> Lewis, “On the Character and Achievement of Sir Winston Churchill,” 175.

<sup>140</sup> Priyamvada Gopal, “Why can’t Britain handle the truth about Winston Churchill?,” *The Guardian*, March 17, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/mar/17/why-cant-britain-handle-the-truth-about-winston-churchill>.

mindset of younger generation. Younger people started to question why controversial aspects of their nation as a former colony aren't more talked about. For example, the famine in Bengal<sup>141</sup> that was mentioned on a number of occasions throughout this thesis.

With everything that was explored so far, it is so surprise that Churchill's career is met with various approaches, whether it is an approached from the United States or Great Britain, or India, as a former British colony. In my opinion, every approach to this topic is valid and should be perceived as important when it comes to discussions about Churchill.

## 4.2 Empire and race

Today, the history of India as a former colony and its culture being influenced by the British rule, can now serve as an example of "imperial racism" with all the aspects of it. It was often contradictory, as people of India were perceived as subordinate, their society was regarded as unable to develop, but on the other hand, many aspects of their culture and industry were widely appreciated. Britain created schools in India with the intent to Anglicize Indians. The aim was to develop adoration towards literature written in English language, with this aim being applied even today. This effort led to the Indian independency, however.<sup>142</sup>

Imperialistic views are now considered wrong and are perceived as a way of exploiting other nations. But what Churchill saw in India had the opposite effect on him, as he felt like Britain was the cause of peace and development of all kinds. Nowadays, we understand that the British presence in India was oppression, but Churchill saw it as evidence that Britain was a great Empire and decided to defend it at all costs. Even Churchill's personal interests were of lesser importance to him, than his vision of the future of the Empire.<sup>143</sup>

The imperialistic views Churchill held are among aspects of his career that are seen as one of his biggest controversies. Many heated discussions arise when this topic is mentioned, since race and power are topics that still remain a sensitive subject. The most prominent aspect of Churchill's career that he is remembered for in the west, is his role in the World War II. But when it comes to countries that used to be ruled by Britain, he is seen as an imperialist, and it is his "imperial legacy that is often seen as extremely damaging." What is striking is also the contrast between the Churchill who stood against the Nazis and the Churchill who possessed outdated views regarding people of colour that were natives of

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<sup>141</sup> Limaye, "Churchill's legacy leaves Indians questioning his hero status."

<sup>142</sup> Ali Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 48.

<sup>143</sup> Roberts, *Churchill*, 39–40.

countries under the British rule. If we want to understand the full complexity of his character, a crucial condition will have to be fulfilled – the thorough study “of the imperial politics.”<sup>144</sup>

As Richard Toye says in the book *Winston Churchill: Politics, Strategy and Statecraft*, Winston Churchill definitely possessed racist views. But what also has to be mentioned is the fact that those views were common during the Victorian era. But people of Victorian society who were of different views regarding race, also existed, and some of them did not agree with Churchill’s views regarding the Empire as well. Those issues are complex it is hard to explain them. There are opposite approaches even between authors. Clive Ponting puts emphasis on the racial views Churchill held, and on his “hostility to imperial reform and decolonization” too. On the other hand, author Roland Quinault argues that even though “Churchill held unpalatable views,” he was “relatively enlightened for a man of his time and background.” In addition, authors like John Charmley recognize the decisions Churchill made during the 1940s regarding policies as an important aspect that ensured the British Empire’s authority. To decide on which side one should be, understanding of every aspect of Churchill’s decisions regarding the Empire would be crucial. As some of the historians who defend Churchill argue, this matter is far more complex than “his diehard image would suggest.” But authors who argue against Churchill are also in the right. Whether “Churchill came to be seen as a diehard” it was as a result of a number of decisions that were made intentionally on his part.<sup>145</sup> All in all, Churchill’s career needs thorough examination in order to make a clear opinion of his actions, as it was stated above.

### 4.3 History of racism and white supremacy

Throughout the history, black people were seen by whites as subordinate, uncivilized, and underdeveloped. People in the United States who possessed the white supremacist views assumed that the black people were a race that was unable to progress and become a part of the “modern world,” with this opinion stemming from history of slavery and “savagery of Africa.” For that reason, black people suffered far worse in the U.S. than the Jews.<sup>146</sup>

As the author George M. Fredrickson says in his book *Racism: A Short History*, *white supremacy* as a term “is limited in its application to only one type of racism.” A type based on skin colour or bodily features. He continues by saying that as racism started to be studied in more depth during the 1920s, it was used only with the division of white-skinned people

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<sup>144</sup> Toye, *Winston Churchill: Politics, Strategy and Statecraft*, 105.

<sup>145</sup> Toye, *Winston Churchill: Politics, Strategy and Statecraft*, 106.

<sup>146</sup> George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 94–5.

or the “Caucasian race.” The aim was to make further division between the “Aryans or Nordics” who were recognized as of even better status than other people of white skin. Racism is thus a term known only for few decades, as its origin can be tracked to the beginning of the previous century.<sup>147</sup>

“The two main forms of modern racism—the color-coded white supremacist variety and the essentialist version of antisemitism” can be tracked “to the late medieval and early modern periods.” What was believed during this time, was that being a slave must have been the will of God. Furthermore, Christians believed that “the great curse” provided them with the right to feel superior to others. For that reason, the European population started to search for evidence of that conviction. In the end, their views seemed to be correct, as some parts of the Bible were understood as a confirmation of that views. By being “emancipated from Christian universalism” and “clearly disassociated from traditionalist conceptions of social hierarchy” racism could become an ideology. During that period, it was common that birth was the origin for inequality. With that said, for racism to become its fully developed form, it was necessary to get rid of any kind of hierarchy in the society and pursue equality, even though this argument can be understood as contradictory.<sup>148</sup> The search for evidence in the Bible that there is a clear division between races, was thus a way of supporting racist views.<sup>149</sup>

When it comes to Britain, as racism started to expand and the native people started to express resistance, the British rule over colonies became crueler during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The original nature of imperialism is what gave racism the basis for growth. But the difference of the natives “was always ambivalent and often contradictory.”<sup>150</sup>

If we view racism as connected with the evolution of humanity, a conclusion can be made that racism developed even further just during the previous century. During that period, both aspects of racism, “white supremacist variety and antisemitism in its naturalistic or secular form” developed into the most extreme forms.<sup>151</sup> It was during the 1930s, mainly as a reaction to the Nazis and their aim to remove the Jews from Germany, when “the term ‘racism’ was coined”. The reason of Nazi goal was the conviction that the Jews endangered the “Aryan race to which authentic Germans supposedly belonged.”<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, 155–6.

<sup>148</sup> Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, 46–7.

<sup>149</sup> Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, 51.

<sup>150</sup> Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction*, 47.

<sup>151</sup> Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, 99.

<sup>152</sup> Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction*, 4.

Even at the beginning of this century, racism is still recognized as a worldwide issue. Usually, it is used “to describe hostility and discrimination directed against a group for virtually any reason.” But most of the time, racism is connected with ethnicity in some type of way. In most cases, it is the language spoken by a certain group, their religious beliefs, traditions, and typical appearance that we connect with a certain ethnic group. Those aspects are usually the impulse of any type of discrimination performed by a group that is of different characteristics. But it is not only the skin colour that provokes racism.<sup>153</sup>

As for today, it may seem like the difference between skin colours has vanished as the capitalism is now a common thing. It does not differentiate between people when it comes to business. But a type of division is still present. To this day, people whose ancestors are not from Europe are “on the average poorer and more disadvantaged” as a result of the past of their countries.<sup>154</sup>

If we really want to accuse somebody of racism or if we want to prove that racism still occurs, it is necessary to have a term that would work as a clear and exact explanation. This fact would involve the United Kingdom as well, since it is crucial mainly “in anti-racist legislation.” Naturally, the United Kingdom also has legislation concerning discrimination. Their “anti-discriminatory laws have been defined as ‘Race Relations Acts’,” and they are in use since 1965.<sup>155</sup>

Nowadays, the term has many meanings and includes a number of aspects which make it hard to use. As George M. Fredrickson describes in his book *Racism: A Short History*, this term “can mean either a lamentable absence of ‘color blindness’ in an allegedly postracist age *or* insensitivity to past and present discrimination against groups that to be helped must be racially categorized.” What the author says is that the term has many uses that can negatively affect “members of groups thought of as ‘races,’ even if a conscious belief that they are inferior or unworthy is absent.” With that said, it is possible that racism will become such a wide term that historians will not be able to use it anymore. But there is no doubt that a term that would express “some horrendous acts of brutality and injustice that were clearly inspired by beliefs associated with the concept of race” is needed.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, 139–40.

<sup>154</sup> Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, 148.

<sup>155</sup> Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction*, 87.

<sup>156</sup> Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, 151–2.

## CONCLUSION

This Bachelor's thesis was created as a summary of the life of the former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The main goal of this thesis was to discuss the negative aspects of Churchill's career that affected the way he is seen nowadays. The thesis was divided into four main chapters that discussed different periods of Churchill's life, in an effort to serve as a short biography and exploration of Churchill's controversies.

As it was explored in this thesis, Winston Churchill was a man that made the Empire his priority and based his actions on its prosperity without seemingly taking into account at what cost the prosperity will be achieved. He was a strong believer of the idea that the British are superior. This idea stemmed from his love of Empire that was deeply rooted in him since the young age, as he was growing up in a time period of Britain being one of the world's powers with colonies placed all over the world map. It is no surprise that he never questioned its might and accepted the fact that other nations were subordinate to Britain. The devotion to one's own nation is praise-worthy, but disregard of the needs of other nations is not, speaking mainly about India that suffered during the Bengal famine, for example.

Churchill sought ways of gaining power wherever, whenever and however he could by using, and one could say exploiting, every possible opportunity that came his way which, in the end, made him a man that will be remembered many decades to come as the British Prime Minister that helped Britain get through the World War II.

History is something that needs to be remembered and as it is recorded, it thankfully works as a way of learning from past mistakes that the humanity made throughout different time periods in the past, and the actions of people and their attitudes towards any kind of matter are history's components that are crucial to our knowledge as well. From Churchill's actions many lessons can be learnt, as events may repeat themselves, and judging by today's standards is what can make our future decisions easier.

The aim of this thesis was not only to summarize Churchill's life, but also to explore controversies that circulate Churchill's career, and hopefully this aim was fulfilled. What was also intended was to describe different approaches that exist regarding his wrongdoings, which was done in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

All in all, Winston Churchill is remembered for his achievement to this day and is seen as a significant figure of the previous century. But what should not be forgotten are also his failures during his life, which make him controversial and criticized.

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