

## The Connection Between British Exceptionalism and Brexit

John Macejka

### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to ascertain the direct role of historical British exceptionalism in enabling and galvanizing Brexit. In aiming to answer the question - why did Brexit occur? - it becomes vital to undertake a historical perspective to grasp insight into the mentality underlying the distinctly British claim that Britain is better off without the EU. The answer is unique to the accustomed historical excellence of Great Britain throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries. Britain's isolated geography reveals the roots of its early exceptionalism and its inherent connection with isolation. Meanwhile, a pair of World War victories and the antagonistic actions of modern contemporaries during each once more affirmed British exceptionalism. Finally, this paper considers the formation of Britain's placement in Europe's new world order in the post-war period, reflecting upon each in coalition with modern British perspectives to offer a unique historical explanation for the occurrence of Brexit.

Keywords: Brexit, exceptionalism, Great Britain, EU

### Introduction

Great Britain is the European exception. Historically, Great Britain is accustomed to habitual financial domination, colonial hegemony, and military superiority over land-locked European contemporaries. In the modern era, Britons view themselves as the *sole* European exception, quintessentially encapsulated in their refusal to adopt the EURO, non-Euro centric trade patterns, and ardently Pro-American worldview, despite membership in the European Union and proximity to European contemporaries. Thus, the emergence of British divergence from the European Union, in fact, the nation's participation to begin with, should exist as no surprise considering the nation's uniquely distinctive past. Of course, the equation is hardly so simple; EU membership entails stability, democracy, security, and economic prosperity for member states, including access to virtually 450 million consumers without trade-constraint.<sup>1</sup> The question thus becomes, why did Brexit occur?

The answer is an intricate web of historical realities culminating in the existence of the broad term "British Exceptionalism." This paper discusses the development of such an intricate nation-view, first delving into the complex geographic implications of the British island-state, a positioning that importantly allowed an expansion of economy and military not observable anywhere else in Europe. Following is a discussion of the far-reaching ramifications of two World War victories, conflicts that resulted in a blossoming of economy, absence of perpetual political upheaval and discord, and renewed sense of pride particular to the United Kingdom. Next, and of foremost relevance due to recency, is an analysis of Great Britain's placement in Europe's new world order in the aftermath of World War II, particularly the ostracizing of the nation in the formation of the European Economic Community, and the relative discontentment that resulted.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Benefits of EU Membership," Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, accessed 28 September 2020, <https://mkik.hu/en/benefits-of-eu-membership>.

Thus, the call for Brexit five years ago (and its astonishing majority public backing) will be connected to the exceptional economic and military successes of Great Britain exhibited throughout a long, cultured history of isolationist success, in coalition with a disenchantment from continental Europe steeped in relatively modern historical precedent.<sup>2</sup>

### Splendid Isolation

The phrase "splendid isolation" was coined in 1885 in reference to a flourishing Great Britain, a nation isolated in both politics and border from continental Europe.<sup>3</sup> The lack of tangible land boundaries with mainland Europe implicated a development of economy, military, and culture divisively different from Britain's European counterparts.

Great Britain benefited from an abundance of coal and iron in terms of natural resources, both imperative in producing refined goods and responsible for the exceptionally early industrial revolution lacking previous precedent. Furthermore, island-centric geography importantly allowed expansive volumes of massively beneficial trade while simultaneously alleviating the "serious constraints on the overall socio-economic development of landlocked developing countries."<sup>4</sup> Resultantly, British trade burgeoned in the early 1900s and prosperity consequently boomed, drastically improving welfare at a rate not observable to any substantial degree in European contemporaries and culminating in a culture accustomed to economic affluence and global prominence.<sup>5</sup>

Great Britain blossomed into the British Empire in the early 20th century. Allowing extensive economic manipulation and the development of a culture of innate superiority, imperialist Britain exercised dominion over nearly 350 million people.<sup>6</sup> The parasitic relationship's economic benefits allowed the expansion of financial reach and specialization of labor that increased wealth exponentially, exemplified by the Cape-Cairo project. Furthermore, the emergence of global, monopolized trade sources provided effective basis for a prosperous international economy. Thus, Britain is distinctive in economic history, habituated to having financial affairs detached from adjoining neighbors and used to sustained economic prosperity built on a culture of modern superiority.

The geography of Great Britain enabled economically beneficial growth in trade and imperialist interests in the late 1800s. Superior economically to continental European competitors, barring the slight exception of the burgeoning industrial giant Germany (with whom economic resentment was beginning to manifest), Great Britain succeeded in achieving relative hegemony and prosperity in the pre-war World War I period. Presently colony-less and eternally isolated

---

<sup>2</sup> "EU REFERENDUM, UK votes to LEAVE the EU," BBC News, BBC, accessed 16 June 2021, [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu\\_referendum/results](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results).

<sup>3</sup> "splendid isolation," Oxford Reference, accessed 17 Jun. 2021, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100524374>.

<sup>4</sup> "About the Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs)," UN-OHRLLS, accessed 28 September 2020, <http://un-ohrlls.org/about-lldc/>.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory Clark, Kevin Hjortshøj O'Rourke, and Alan M. Taylor, "The growing dependence of Britain on trade during the Industrial Revolution," *Scandinavian Economic History Review* vol. 62/2 (2014): 109.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick K. O'Brien, "The Costs and Benefits of British Imperialism 1846-1914," *Past & Present* vol. 120 (1988): 163.

from mainland Europe, Great Britain is still a leader in world trade, critically exporting more than *half* of its goods outside the European Union.<sup>7</sup>

Disconnected from Europe geographically, the British enjoyed and continue to enjoy a modest level of security principally divorced from the discord perpetually occurring in continental Europe. On the continent, proximity to various distinct nation-states implicated a degree of reasonable prudence, namely ready-to-use economic, political, and military capacities observable in European contemporaries. Similarly, contentions yielding inopportune outcomes set the stage for future violence, a predisposition elevated in risk by the lack of substantial barriers between states with arbitrary boundaries. Thus, the British Channel's existence did more than just separate; it also cultivated an idea circulating in fullness even today - continental detachment and security go hand in hand.

In the early 1900s, due to geographic location, Great Britain was not merely different - Great Britain was exceptionally different. The effects of seclusion yielded incredible benefits for Great Britain; not until the globalization of the mid-1900s would Great Britain falter, but the effects of "splendid" geographical "isolation" are observable in advocates for Brexit - the call for a return to the prosperous, superior British independence - and the country itself today.

### **The Impact of War**

A comprehensive observation of broad British military and economic realities yields a similar conclusion in the 20th century: Britain is historically exceptional. Comparably, the economic and military developments commencing in the periods immediately before and in the wake of World War II contributed more observably and directly to Brexit, due primarily to the recency of the events. Evidence of such a claim is tangible in societal apprehension and economic skepticism towards former adversaries. To be discussed presently, in brief, is Great Britain's involvement in World War I, the economic after effects, and in much greater depth, World War II and its implications.

Great Britain's entry into World War I was, at least in the British government's eyes, astonishingly, not a direct result of the nation's involvement in the Triple Entente, nor a consequence of imperialist interests, nor even out of fear of further German expansion. Instead, much to the German Kaiser's bewilderment, British participation was predicated on a "scrap of paper" signed nearly a century earlier, committing British assistance to Belgium in case of an invasion.<sup>8</sup> Outside perspective might doubt the veracity of such a narrow-scoped recounting of British involvement, but at least in Great Britain, the reason for military embroilment was diplomatic duty. Over a

---

<sup>7</sup> Sean Fleming, "These Are the UK's Top Five Trading Partners," World Economic Forum, 22 November 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/11/brexit-trade-uk-eu/>.

<sup>8</sup> Ben Walsh, "Why Did Britain Go to War? Background," The National Archives, BBC History, 27 January 2004, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/greatwar/g2/backgroundcs1.htm>.

century later, the majority of the British populace still believes that the country should be proud of the conflict and the victory that resulted.<sup>9</sup>

In the aftermath of the calamitous World War I, Great Britain developed increasingly disparate from Germany and much of continental Europe: moderate in political matters, isolated from impetuous conflicts, and financially adjoined from the dire need for charitable external intervention (the Dawes Plan). Furthermore, in contrast to the land-locked and colony-less Germany, in 1924, Great Britain controlled an absurd 1/5 of the entire globe.<sup>10</sup> And, despite a disastrous depression ravaging the nation in the aftermath of the war, Great Britain emerged relatively unscathed comparative to continental European powers, due chiefly to massive amounts of public spending and a strict adherence to the gold standard. Once again, Great Britain was exceptionally well-off relative to continental Europe financially and territorially.

World War II is of imperative importance to understanding theorized British exceptionalism in the modern era and its connection to Brexit. Stringently isolationist and increasingly democratic (extension of voting rights to *all* men over 21 and women over 30 in 1918), Britons were vehemently opposed to the idea of another ruinous war.<sup>11</sup> Sympathetic of Germany due to the admittedly unrealistic constraints and reparations constituted by the Treaty of Versailles, Great Britain, like much of Europe, anxiously looked on as Hitler egregiously violated the agreement. Eventually, Great Britain entered the war by virtue of necessity, a key fact to recall considering the conflict's triumphant conclusion. The collapse of France, and continental Europe as a whole, left Great Britain isolated and all but defeated. Nevertheless, the miraculous escapement of 338,226 troops at Dunkirk signified hope, and the emergence of a now immortalized Winston Churchill further improved British morale.<sup>12</sup>

The impact of Winston Churchill can not be understated. Universally regarded as the Greatest Briton of all time, Churchill galvanized a battered, beaten, and all but defeated nation to continue struggling against a seemingly insurmountable foe.<sup>13</sup> Elected not a moment too soon, the infamous Battle of Britain commenced less than two months after the politician's selection.<sup>14</sup> The Battle of Britain is crucial to understanding British pride in the era and in the modern day. In a disastrously miscalculated German effort to deteriorate the populace's will to fight, pilots strategi-

---

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Smith, “We Should Be Proud of Involvement in the First World War, Believe Half of Britons,” YouGov, 9 November 2018, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2018/11/09/we-should-be-proud-involvement-first-world-war-bel>.

<sup>10</sup> “The British Empire: 1783-1924 - The British Empire through Time,” accessed October 19, 2020, Bitesize, BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zf7fr82/revision/6>.

<sup>11</sup> “Key dates,” UK Parliament, accessed 16 June 2021, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/chartists/keydates/>

<sup>12</sup> “Press Office - Dunkirk Facts & Figures,” Press Office, BBC, 21 June 2014, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2004/02\\_february/03/dunkirk\\_facts\\_figures.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2004/02_february/03/dunkirk_facts_figures.shtml).

<sup>13</sup> “Churchill voted greatest Briton,” BBC News World Edition, BBC, 24 November 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/2509465.stm#:~:text=Sir%20Winston%20Churchill%20has%20been,sig%20individuals%2C%20with%20447%2C423%20votes>.

<sup>14</sup> “The Battle of Britain Begins,” History, 16 November 2009, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-battle-of-britain-begins>.

cally and unrestrictedly bombed civilian areas as opposed to tactical military targets. Approximated costs amount to nearly £4.5 billion today, and the discriminate raids cost approximately 70,000 civilian lives.<sup>15</sup> And yet still, standing tall in the face of overwhelming adversity and roused perpetually by the magnificently eloquent Churchill, the nation trudged onwards undeterred, imperatively affirming a legacy of resilience and dignity observable in Great Britain today.

As the only non-neutral, entirely European nation to not capitulate, Great Britain emerged unconquered and triumphant from World War II. Left behind was a bitter resentment and persistent distrust of Germany, mounting upon suspicion of emerging German economic prevalence and aggression both before and after World War I. Still, the nation stood proud, victorious yet again in a battle of economy, military, and ideology. In an apprehended Europe, only Great Britain remained autonomous, and in a fashion more identifiably exceptional to the British public than ever before, Great Britain was once again exceptional. Despite massive American efforts, weighed more significantly by mainland Europe, astonishingly, Britons even today believe the British contribution to have been of greater importance - the *only* nation to think that the case.<sup>16</sup> To much of Great Britain, there was only one way to explain the victorious conclusion of the war, "British superiority had saved the world".<sup>17</sup>

### Diminishing Global Relevance

The post-war period featured a host of economic developments that shed light on British society's current state and its modern frustration with the European Union. Burdened by immense post-war debt (270% of GDP), Great Britain reluctantly released many colonies in the years following the conflict.<sup>18</sup> The resulting implications were drastic, allowing a more centralized focus on the economic well-being of the home-state and enabling a progression into the more sophisticated industries of modern Europe, while also critically eliminating a nearly monopolized source of trade. Forthcoming is a discussion of the rationale behind the ceding of the colonies and the simplified processes' implications, followed by a comprehensive observation of the economic state of Great Britain in the aftermath of World War II; an ascertainment which will reveal the historical source of the discontentment with British economic viability in the modern age.

World War II's triumphant conclusion introduced a complex concern into British political circles: the enormous, expanding expense of maintaining colonies. Left virtually bankrupt in the wake of World War II, and consequently financially unable to rule over approximately 700 million extra-continental people, the post-war period saw the British Empire's dissolution, prudently by

---

<sup>15</sup> David Todman, "The cruel cost of the Blitz: how did everyday Britons rebuild their lives," *BBC History Magazine*, December 2017, 49.

<sup>16</sup> William Jordan, "People in Britain and the U.S. Disagree on Who Did More to Beat the Nazis," YouGov, 1 May 2015, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2015/05/01/Britain-America-disagree-who-did-more-beat-nazis>.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew J. Crozier, "British exceptionalism: pride and prejudice and Brexit," *International Economics and Economic Policy*, Springer vol. 17/3 (2020): 635.

<sup>18</sup> "Post-World War II debt reduction," Office for Budget Responsibility, 11 September 2017, <https://obr.uk/box/post-world-war-ii-debt-reduction/>.



choice.<sup>19</sup> Comparative to France and Portugal, this decision was abnormal, as the two prior states would wage immensely costly conflicts to maintain colonial power.<sup>20</sup> However, the loss of the colonies would prove exorbitant in other ways, leading to the diminishment of a monopolized trade source. Thus, while Great Britain judiciously avoided some excessive costs, ineffable unforeseen benefits were forgone in releasing the colonies. Still, the unprecedented decision to allow independence without struggle further enabled the British to ideologically differentiate from European contemporaries - no matter the theorized economic cost.

The decades following the war's conclusion featured a British "golden age" shared in full by mainland Europe. High-tech industry flourished, as Britain rose to prominence in the novel industries of aerospace and computer software. Similarly, as Keynesian economics's conceptual birthplace, the government gained a beneficial tool in the positive manipulation of the economy. Incredibly, the 1950s and 1960s featured an average unemployment rate of just 2%.<sup>21</sup> Real wages also rose an astonishing 40% from 1950 to 1965, signaling an emerging middle class and elevation of the typical Briton.<sup>22</sup> Each of these beneficial developments was unparalleled in the scope of Great Britain's remarkable history. However, despite Great Britain admittedly and blatantly being far beyond continental Europe in preceding economic growth and urbanization, and thus having less room to expand, mainland European powerhouses far exceeded the UK in economic development during the period. The continuation of such a trend of "catch-up" indisputably led to a resentful decline in perceived global British relevance.

Commencing in 1955, a swath of far-reaching changes inundated Europe. The historical Messina Conference cultivated inter-European relationships amongst the "core six" of France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. But, more importantly, Great Britain attended the conference, and their proposal, a Euro Free Trade Area, was ardently rejected. Thus, Great Britain remained detached from both the European Economic Community (1957) and the European Atomic Energy Community (1958), as European integration proceeded absent of British influence, breeding British discontentment with the post-war European society.

Exclusion reached a zenith when, in 1963, the French vetoed a British attempt to join the European Economic Community (the EEC Great Britain walked away from previously). Pertinently, the principal reason for British intrigue was astonishment "at the rapid economic advances made by France and Germany," highlighting a decline in perceived British economic superiority touched upon previously. An attempt to curtail Germany and France's dual emergence at the Stockholm Convention (1959) proved ineffective, as the contesting British free-trade union (the EFTA) made negligible progress in affording member states the same economic opportunities as the EEC. Thus, unsurprisingly, despite initial denial, the United Kingdom continued to seek entry into the prosperous EEC, receiving refusal once more in 1967, before finally garnering acceptance in 1973.

---

<sup>19</sup> Judith Brown, *The Twentieth Century, The Oxford History of the British Empire* (London: Oxford University Press 2001), 87.

<sup>20</sup> David Abernethy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance, European Overseas Empires 1415–1980* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press), 401.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Gurney, "The Battle of the Consumer in Postwar Britain," *Journal of Modern History* vol. 77/4 (2005): 956.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Addison and Harriet Jones, *A companion to contemporary Britain, 1939–2000* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2005), 207.

To a nation accustomed to perpetual success and leadership, reluctance and resentment blossomed, as evidenced by the British referendum to leave the EEC a mere two years later. The referendum failed, however, due to the immensely beneficial economic dynamism of the EEC at the time, establishing the claim that Britain's original membership was predicated upon the EEC's economic viability.<sup>23</sup>

The gradual diminishment of British influence in the decades following World War II is an atypical embodiment of the deterioration of a world power. The nation's declining economic advantages became blatant in the frantic, futile effort to maintain continental European authority in forming the EFTA, confirming the decline's irreversibility. Ultimately, Germany and France possessed the means of overcoming established British economic exceptionalism, presumably frustrating citizens as the lack of British military recognition for World War II successes occurred contemporaneously. Habitually accustomed to being exceptional, Great Britain's inability to curtail the reciprocal influences of Germany and France, encapsulated in the acquiescing of the EEC over the previously cultivated and supported EFTA, were indicative of a transition to Britain's becoming part of a broader whole, while the eventually dubious and disillusioned membership, repressed by a perpetual skepticism of the interests of Germany, and now France, foreshadowed the eventual division to occur.

### **Connecting Historical Exceptionalism to Modern Brexit**

Brexit astonished the world. Modern contemporaries argue the root causes to be multifaceted and vast, and while such assertions are valid and will be touched upon, the very fact that Great Britain can leave the European Union is cemented in tangible British exceptionalism. No other European nation is as non-Euro-centric. Ardently pro-American, total British exports to the European Union have dropped precipitously, decreasing "from 54% in 2000 to 43% in 2016," circumvented instead to the United States and China, amongst others.<sup>24</sup> Great Britain is an island, principally disconnected from the European continent. Great Britain is and was, especially during the century previous to its joining the EU, the crown jewel of Europe economically, politically, and militarily.

Critically, the British populace sees each of these realities in a "rose-tinted" light. At least through the British lens, Great Britain never required the assistance of an outside power, unlike Germany and France. Great Britain repeatedly demonstrated immense resilience and vitality in World Wars I and II, crushing Germany not once, but twice. Great Britain never faltered economically, even dignifiedly liberating economically beneficial colonies without armed insurrection. Although prosperity has not been perpetual, Great Britain has always found a way to survive and eventually thrive, existing as a "beacon of democracy and liberty" while pioneering economic success and liberation over the last century.<sup>25</sup> It is this culture of accustomed affluence and success

---

<sup>23</sup> "The EEC and Britain's Late Entry," The Cabinet Papers, The National Archives, 28 November 2008, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/eec-britains-late-entry.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> "Who Does the UK Trade with," Office for National Statistics, 3 January 2018, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/business-industryandtrade/internationaltrade/articles/whodoestheuktradewith/2017-02-21>.

<sup>25</sup> Simon Tilford, "The British and Their Exceptionalism," Centre For European Reform, 3 May 2017, <https://www.cer.eu/insights/british-and-their-exceptionalism>.

that is responsible for the idea that Britain can achieve a practical, beneficial Brexit - it is British Exceptionalism.

And while continental Europe does not see Great Britain in that same rose-tinted light, some 87% of British citizens presently claim that being "European" does not define their identity.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, it was disproportionately “older people in the UK” (older than 50) that support reclaiming powers from the EU; individuals who, in direct alignment with the underlying claims of this paper, necessarily experienced a pre-EU Britain and its idealized prosperity.<sup>27</sup> Undeniably, Great Britain is the most well-suited European nation in both widespread consensus and economy to depart from the European Union - this alone provides tangible evidence of the connection between British exceptionalism and Brexit.

To be sure, a host of issues are *directly* responsible for Great Britain's hasty exit from the EU: burdensome regulations, a disastrous, non-shared Euro, excessive immigration, and a "growing distrust of multinational financial, trade, and defense organizations” to name a few, but the unifying thread connecting each is that Great Britain, not a bunch of bureaucrats sitting in Brussels hundreds of miles away, can more effectively ameliorate each dilemma.<sup>28</sup> And indeed, in June 2016, just prior to the Brexit vote, British public opinion perfectly reflected such an assertion, as a mere 6% of Britons voiced a desire “to transfer more powers” to Brussels while 65% of the population wished for more powers to be returned to the national government.<sup>29</sup> Why? The answer is inherent and apparent - Great Britain is not another European state to play by 27 others' interests; Great Britain is a historically sovereign and overwhelmingly prosperous state that has known, and continues to know, how to best govern itself. There is no need for outside-interference or regulation; each of the distinctive historical developments discussed previously points to a conclusion that Britons evidently feel more passionate about than any other nation on Earth - Great Britain is exceptionally well-suited to autonomously govern itself. Fittingly, such exceptionalism directly intertwines with the very fact that Brexit is possible - Great Britain never abandoned its benchmark currency: the Pound.

## Conclusion

The future implications of Brexit are sure to be diverse and, above all else, virtually impossible to currently ascertain. A rapidly evolving global landscape, bolstered by technological innovation of unimaginable proportion and drastically affected by the novel COVID-19 pandemic, signifies that the world is much different than in the decades before the EU when Great Britain quite literally ruled the world. Critically, however, historical precedent points to Great Britain once again emerging relatively unscathed. In the eyes of the British, a nation perpetually detached from

---

<sup>26</sup> Jim Mann, “Britain Uncovered Survey Results: the Attitudes and Beliefs of Britons in 2015,” *The Guardian*, 19 April 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/apr/19/britain-uncovered-survey-attitudes-beliefs-britons-2015>.

<sup>27</sup> Dorothy Manevich, “British crave more autonomy from EU as Brexit vote nears,” *Pew Research Center*, 8 June 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/08/british-crave-more-autonomy-from-eu-as-brexit-vote-nears/>.

<sup>28</sup> John Mauldin and George Friedman, “3 Reasons Brits Voted For Brexit,” *Forbes*, 20 April 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnmauldin/2016/07/05/3-reasons-brits-voted-for-brexit/>.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*



the consensus views of continental Europe, the idea of a renewal of "splendid isolation" is too good to refuse. A century of beneficial separation, principally due to advantageous geography, has permanently idealized such a notion, and the emergence of resentment due to French and German military and economic actions has substantially affirmed that very idea. The growing nationalism of Great Britain *is* British Exceptionalism, and the undeniable reality that *only* Great Britain can escape the supposedly pernicious grasp of the EU adds veracity to the pair.

In 2015, the European Commission (an executive branch of the EU) presciently commented on the ever-increasing plausibility of countries departing from the EU due to mounting levels of “euroskepticism” as a consequence of recent economic turmoil.<sup>30</sup> And, while Brexit may have ultimately been galvanized by the recent failures of the European Union in coping with the global financial and sovereign debt crises, it is historical British exceptionalism that explains *why* Brexit appears to the everyday Briton as so appealing. Whether coincidence or not, the idealized period of British hegemony and superiority over European contemporaries occurred prior, and not during, its membership in the EU. Most Britons are well aware of Great Britain’s unique history of affluence and exceptionalism, as well as both the absences or evils of European contemporaries along that path.<sup>31</sup> Great Britain is exceptional both modernly, and more importantly, historically. And while the former *enables* Great Britain to leave the European Union, it is a century of British exceptionalism absent of EU interference that substantiates the idea that prosperity is better assured in Great Britain becoming the European exception once more by exiting the European Union. Brexit is, therefore, as much a consequence of recent socio-economic and political forces in the EU as it is a result of one now evident and indisputable truth, Great Britain is historically exceptional.

---

<sup>30</sup> Charles Wyplosz, “The Centralization-Decentralization Issue,” European Commission, *Discussion Paper 014*, September 2015, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/dp014\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/dp014_en.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> “History programmes of study: key stage 3,” Department for Education, National Archives, 2013, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/239075/SECOND-ARY\\_national\\_curriculum\\_-\\_History.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/239075/SECOND-ARY_national_curriculum_-_History.pdf).

## Works Cited

- Abernethy, David. *The Dynamics of Global Dominance, European Overseas Empires 1415–1980*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002.
- "About the Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs)." UN-OHRLLS. Accessed 28 September 2020. <http://unohrlls.org/about-lldc/>.
- Addison, Paul and Jones, Harriet. *A companion to contemporary Britain, 1939–2000*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2005.
- "Benefits of EU Membership." Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Accessed 28 September 2020. <https://mkik.hu/en/benefits-of-eu-membership>.
- Brown, Judith. *The Twentieth Century, The Oxford History of the British Empire*. London: Oxford University Press 2001.
- "Churchill voted greatest Briton," BBC News World Edition, BBC, 24 November 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/2509465.stm#:~:text=Sir%20Winston%20Churchill%20has%20been,significant%20in%20individuals%20with%20447%20423%20votes>.
- Clark, Gregory, O'Rourke, Kevin H, Taylor, Alan M. "The growing dependence of Britain on trade during the Industrial Revolution." *Scandinavian Economic History Review* vol. 62/2 (2014): 109.
- Crozier, Andrew J. "British exceptionalism: pride and prejudice and Brexit." *International Economics and Economic Policy*, Springer vol. 17/3 (2020): 635.
- "EU REFERENDUM, UK votes to LEAVE the EU." BBC News. BBC. Accessed 16 June 2021. [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu\\_referendum/results](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results).
- Fleming, Sean. "These Are the UK's Top Five Trading Partners." World Economic Forum, 22 November 2019. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/11/brexit-trade-uk-eu/>.
- Gurney, Peter. "The Battle of the Consumer in Postwar Britain." *Journal of Modern History* vol. 77/4 (2005): 956.
- "History programmes of study: key stage 3." Department for Education. National Archives, 2013. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/239075/SECONDARY\\_national\\_curriculum\\_-\\_History.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/239075/SECONDARY_national_curriculum_-_History.pdf).
- Jordan, William. "People in Britain and the U.S. Disagree on Who Did More to Beat the Nazis." YouGov, 1 May 2015. <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2015/05/01/Britain-America-disagree-who-did-more-beat-nazis>.

“Key dates.” UK Parliament. Accessed 16 June 2021. <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/chartists/keydates/>

Manevich, Dorothy. “British crave more autonomy from EU as Brexit vote nears.” Pew Research Center, 8 June 2016. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/08/british-crave-more-autonomy-from-eu-as-brexit-vote-nears/>.

Mann, Jim. “Britain Uncovered Survey Results: the Attitudes and Beliefs of Britons in 2015.” The Guardian, 19 April 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/apr/19/britain-uncovered-survey-attitudes-beliefs-britons-2015>.

Mauldin, John and Friedman, George. “3 Reasons Brits Voted For Brexit.” Forbes, 20 April 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnmauldin/2016/07/05/3-reasons-brits-voted-for-brexit/>.

O’Brien, Patrick K. “The Costs and Benefits of British Imperialism 1846-1914.” *Past & Present* vol. 120 (1988): 163.

“Post-World War II debt reduction.” Office for Budget Responsibility. 11 September 2017. <https://obr.uk/box/post-world-war-ii-debt-reduction/>.

“Press Office - Dunkirk Facts & Figures.” Press Office. BBC, 21 June 2014. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2004/02\\_february/03/dunkirk\\_facts\\_figures.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2004/02_february/03/dunkirk_facts_figures.shtml).

Smith, Matthew. “We Should Be Proud of Involvement in the First World War, Believe Half of Britons.” YouGov, 9 November 2018. <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2018/11/09/we-should-be-proud-involvement-first-world-war-bel>.

“Splendid isolation.” Oxford Reference. Accessed 17 Jun. 2021. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100524374>.

“The Battle of Britain Begins.” History, 16 November 2009. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-battle-of-britain-begins>.

“The British Empire: 1783-1924 - The British Empire through Time.” Bitesize. BBC. Accessed 19 October 2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zf7fr82/revision/6>.

“The EEC and Britain's Late Entry.” The Cabinet Papers. The National Archives, 28 November 2008. <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/eec-britains-late-entry.htm>.

Tilford, Simon. “The British and Their Exceptionalism.” Centre For European Reform, 3 May 2017. <https://www.cer.eu/insights/british-and-their-exceptionalism>.

Todman, David. “The cruel cost of the Blitz: how did everyday Britons rebuild their lives.” *BBC History Magazine*, December 2017, 49.

Walsh, Ben. “Why Did Britain Go to War? Background.” The National Archives. BBC History, 27 January 2004. <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/greatwar/g2/backgroundes1.htm>.

“Who Does the UK Trade with.” Office for National Statistics. 3 January 2018. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/internationaltrade/articles/whodoestheuktradewith/2017-02-21>.

Wyplosz, Charles. “The Centralization-Decentralization Issue.” European Commission. *Discussion Paper 014*, September 2015. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/dp014\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/dp014_en.pdf).