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FROM LEFT: TUCKER CARLSON SHOW; ASSOCIATED PRESS; DAVE DECKER/ ZUMA PRESS Tucker Carlson, right, and other conservative media figures have promoted the views of podcaster Darryl Cooper, left, who argues that Churchill, above, is the real villain of World War II.



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Why the Far Right Hates Churchill

The accepted historical narrative of the past 80 years—that it was morally right for the U. S. and the U.K. to fight and destroy the Third Reich—is now under assault.

BY ANDREW ROBERTS

In November 1940, Winston Churchill delivered a eulogy in Westminster Abbey at the funeral of Neville Chamberlain, his predecessor as prime minister. He spoke poetically about how historical judgments are reached. "History," he said, "with its flickering lamp, stumbles along the trails of the past, trying to reconstruct its themes, to revive its echoes, and kindle with pale gleams the passion of former days."

Sixty years after his death, Churchill's own reputation is now at the forefront of the culture wars, something that he himself would have relished, having put himself on the front line of five real wars on four continents before the age of 42.

Churchill has long been hated by the left, blamed for opposing socialism and communism, breaking Britain's general strike of 1926, supporting the British Empire and so on. Yet lately a new and particularly virulent strain of Churchill-hatred has broken out on the ultraright on both sides of the Atlantic, where he is blamed for a quite different set of supposed crimes.

The American podcaster Darryl Cooper—who has never written a history book, let alone one about World War II, but whom Tucker Carlson calls "America's most honest historian"—has claimed that it was Churchill's fault that the war escalated from the limited one that Adolf Hitler apparently wanted when he invaded Poland in September 1939. According to Cooper, Churchill was the "chief villain" of World War II, rather than any of the more obvious suspects.

There are a number of problems with this theory, not least chronological. Churchill did not even enter the British government until two days after the Nazis' invasion of Poland. Even then he was not in control of British decision-making, as he did not become prime minister until after Hitler had unleashed his blitzkrieg on Western Europe in May 1940.

Nonetheless, tens of millions of people have downloaded Cooper's ahistoric tripe, and the British neo-Nazi historian David Irving tweeted, "Glad we are in the mainstream narrative, but would be nice to get a credit," which got over a quarter of a million views and over five thousand "likes."

Joe Rogan, the world's most popular podcaster, has similarly opened the door to extreme revisionism, saying that "Darryl [Cooper] has some of the most nuanced, balanced and charitable views on all the figures in history," which is true only if he means the Nazis.

Cooper's remarks on the Tucker Carlson show led the Holocaust-denying podcaster Jake Shields to conduct a poll on X asking "who was the biggest villain of WW2." Among his almost 136,000 respondents, 40.3% gave that distinction to Churchill, with Stalin at 25.9% narrowly beating Hitler at 25.3%.

Shield's post was viewed by some 855,000 people. It led to a spate of online Churchill-hatred, with comments such as "The good guys lost WW2," "Churchill wanted a war," "Churchill was pure evil" and so on endlessly.

Meanwhile in Britain, many representatives of the right-wing populist Reform Party have similarly demonized Churchill.

Ian Gribbin, a general election candidate, posted on the Unherd website that "Britain would be in a far better state today had we taken Hitler up on his offer of neutrality... but oh no, Britain's warped mindset values weird notions of international morality rather than looking after its own people." He later wrote, "In Britain specifically we need to exorcise the cult of Churchill and recognize that in both policy and military strategy, he was abysmal."

Reform's official spokesman then doubled down on these comments when speaking to—ironically enough—the Jewish Chronicle, saying that they were “written with an eye to inconvenient perspectives and truths.”

So why is the ultraright targeting Churchill?

In the simplest terms, it is because his practical aims and principles as a leader of the West were directly opposed to the new strain of isolationism in America and Britain. Today's revisionists project their views about Iraq, Afghanistan and now Iran backward through history and denounce the leading global interventionists of yesteryear. They blame Churchill (along with Franklin Roosevelt) for “escalating” the conflict with Hitler and thus associate him with any effort to confront today's aggressive tyrants.

It is a sign of the lost trust in established institutions on both sides of the Atlantic that the accepted historical narrative of the past 80 years—that it was morally right for the U.S. and the U.K. to fight and destroy the Third Reich—is now under assault. This new revisionism is possible only because the Greatest Generation is dying out, and their sacrifice is becoming a debatable part of history rather than a lived reality.

It is an unfortunate necessity to engage with these benighted and often hateful revisionists. As their failure to win the endorsement of any of the hundreds of serious historians of World War II suggests, their arguments, such as they are, cannot survive contact with the reality of the historical record.

It is perfectly true that Churchill was instrumental in persuading the British war cabinet not to make peace with Hitler. The decision was taken after no fewer than nine discussions over four days between May 25 and May 28, 1940. As they deliberated, a small armada of boats made their way to evacuate the British Expeditionary Force from the beaches of Dunkirk back to Britain.

“The reason I resent Churchill so much for it,” Cooper told Carlson, “is that he kept this war going when he had no way [of winning]. He had no way to go back and fight this war. All he had was bombers...just rank terrorism.” More than that, once Hitler ripped up yet another treaty and invaded Russia in June of 1941, Church--ill immediately made common cause with Stalin against Nazi Germany.

It is worth considering what might have happened had Churchill not urged these fateful choices. If Britain had remained neutral in the West and refrained from bombing Germany, Hitler would have been able to concentrate his entire Luftwaffe against Russia. Instead he had to hold back 30% of it to guard against Churchill's bombers.

Neutrality in the face of Hitler would have meant that the 5,000 aircraft and 7,000 tanks and 51 million pairs of boots and the rest of the aid that Britain and America sent the U.S.S.R. would not have materialized. Nor would the invasion of Normandy have taken place while the Russians and Germans were fighting in Belarus.

Which leads to the obvious: With either Hitler or Stalin controlling all of Europe between Paris and Minsk, the world—including America— would have been in a vastly worse place than the one that Churchill and Roosevelt helped to fashion in 1945.

In his peroration in the Westminster Abbey speech, Churchill said, “The only guide to a man is his conscience; the only shield to his memory is the rectitude and sincerity of his actions. It is very imprudent to walk through life without this shield, because we are so often mocked by the failure of our hopes and the upsetting of our calculations; but with this shield, however the fates may play, we always march in the ranks of honor.”

Despite the best efforts of his revisionist detractors, Churchill marches there still. He stands watching over a world order that is now challenged by, among other things, a populist far right whose influence is spreading dangerously. *Andrew Roberts is the author of “Churchill: Walking with Destiny.” He is a member of the House of Lords.*

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