

20. Berliner Colloquium zur Zeitgeschichte

Winston Churchill as Historian

Hosted by Bernd Greiner and Dierk Walter (both Hamburg Institute for Social Research) and Markus Pöhlmann (German Armed Forces' Centre for Military History and Social Sciences, Potsdam)

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Questionnaire

Session 1

Churchill the Politician as War Historian

Opening remarks Markus Pöhlmann

Chair Bernd Greiner

- * In what nonfiction genre does Churchill's multivolume work *The Second World War* belong? Is it historiography, political journalism or strategically planned autobiography?
- * What does this classification mean for the work's value as a source?
- * What are Churchill's interests in drawing conclusions?
- * What is his position on the historical-critical method?
- * On what primary sources does he rely?
- * What theaters and actions in the war does he devote particular attention to?
- * How should we evaluate Churchill as an author – especially in light of the fact that parts of his work were compiled through the work of others?
- * What place does Churchill take in post-1945 commemorative writing? How does he differ from contemporaries who also wrote, e.g. Albert Speer, Erich von Manstein, Douglas MacArthur or Dwight D. Eisenhower? What does he have in common with them?
- * Why have political and military elites after 1945 been moved to write?
- * What can be said about Churchill's reception (among scholars and the general public, but also professional soldiers)?
- * What effects has his version had on our understanding of the Second World War?

Session 2 **“Blood, Sweat and Tears”: Total War
and the Future of Democracy**

Opening remarks Gerhard Hirschfeld
Chair Martin Schaad

- * How does Churchill make a theme of his “language of mobilization” that he developed during Second World War?
- * How does he evaluate the mobilization potentials, both in military terms and for all of society, of liberal democracies and the British Empire on the one hand and totalitarian systems on the other?
- * How does Churchill confront the dilemma that the Allies resorted to questionable strategies under international law (strategic bombing) and weapons of mass destruction (atomic bombs) to defeat their enemies?
- * What does Churchill have to say about the genocide of European Jewry and his statements on the matter during the Second World War?
- * How does Churchill regard the repercussions of the Second World War on liberal societies and their political constitution?

Session 3 **On the Crisis and Future of the Empire**

Opening remarks Benedikt Stuchtey
Chair Julia Eichenberg

- * What role does the Empire play for Churchill’s self-image, his view of Great Britain’s role in global politics, for his policies and, finally, for his history writing?
- * To what extent were Churchill’s biographical influences (e.g. his participation in imperial conflicts, his particular esteem for the Navy) responsible for the evaluation of the Empire in the Second World War? What role did the changed, latter-day circumstances of the work’s writing have in this respect?
- * How did Churchill perceive the crisis of the Empire and what ideas did he have regarding possible or preferable “exist options”?
- * What historical experiences did Churchill recall when giving a contemporary assessment of the Empire?
- * What part, in Churchill’s view, did ten Second World War and the Cold War play in the dissolution of the Empire?

- * What significance did British-US relations in general and Churchill's relations with Roosevelt in particular have for the course of the Empire from the beginning of the Second World War to the Suez Crisis?
- * During his second term, what influence did Churchill have on Britain's retreat from the Empire?

**Session 4 The Anti-Hitler Coalition, Postwar Order
and the Cold War**

Opening remarks Klaus Larres
Chair Bernd Greiner

- * To what extent does Churchill connect his image of the Soviet Union with the experiences he had during the Second World War?
- * What conclusions does he draw from his postwar experiences for the political, economic and military architecture of the postwar period?
- * What conclusions relevant to the postwar order does Churchill draw from the military strategies of the Second World War, and especially that of strategic bombing?
- * How did the early Cold War color Churchill's representation of the Soviet Union, its interests and policies and Allies relations during the Second World War?
- * How does Churchill reflect the role of the US during the Second World War, and what implicit or explicit conclusions can be drawn as a result?
- * How does Churchill justify his efforts to link the preservation of the Empire with the hardening of the West's position in the Cold War?

Suggested Reading

Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, London 1949, Band 2: *Their Finest Hour*, 3-8; 25-46; 281-300

Sebastian Haffner, *Winston Churchill*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1967, 27-34

Sir Frederick Maurice, *Mr. Churchill as a Military Historian*, in: *Foreign Affairs*, July 1927 (www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-kingdom/1927-07-01/mr-churchill-military-historian [10.08.2015])

David Reynolds, *In Command of History*, New York 2005, 67-89

Richard Toye, *Churchill's Empire. The World that Made Him and the World He Made*, London 2010, 3-34