Hello there history friend, and thanks for listening. This episode is quite clearly huge, but if we’re to introduce you to national honour properly, I feel like the size is justified. Rest assured, I could have spoken for three more hours, but at the very least, by the end of this episode you should have a much clearer picture of what national honour is, why it matters so much, and how I intend to approach it for my PhD research. Since I started my PhD back in 2019, I have never really taken the time to explore or explain what I’m doing in real detail, though I have released smaller series looking at how national honour worked in isolated cases – such as the Trent Affair series, or the series for patrons releasing now which looks at AA relations from 1838-46. Today though, I hope to answer all the questions you might have on the concept. We get very technical, quite theoretical, and certainly rather detailed. But if you can stick with it, you should come away equipped with a fascinating set of conclusions, and you may even see nineteenth century diplomacy through a different lens. So, let’s not delay, and just get into this, by asking the key question about national honour – just what exactly is it?

For the historian to explain national honour – to explore its roots, its hidden depths, its inner meaning, its power, and its influence – is a daunting task. On a mere surface level, however, we can say that national honour was the merging of an individual’s personal honour with the nationalism of the nineteenth century. National honour was by no means a nineteenth century concept, but it did acquire a life and power of its own within that century, powered by the rise of the nation state in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. To ascertain what national honour is, therefore, we must first ask what honour is, and from there, ask how it became intertwined with the nation. But this presents another problem; honour as a concept has received substantial attention from historians, anthropologists, and political scientists, and the literature which has followed is considerable. To engage in an examination of honour as a concept then, it is necessary to start at the beginning.

This is because honour is an ancient idea. Honour has endured the armies of Alexander the Great,[[1]](#footnote-1) the Roman Empire,[[2]](#footnote-2) and then, under a new guise of chivalry,[[3]](#footnote-3) through the Middle Ages. The Renaissance[[4]](#footnote-4) and Romantic Eras both invested new standards into honour,[[5]](#footnote-5) while the French Revolution appears to have reinvigorated honour with a nostalgic idea of chivalry.[[6]](#footnote-6) Through each era of human history, honour was both reinvented and preserved, and one could argue that it was only in 1914 that this ‘era of honour’ came to a violent, bloody end. Allen Hertz, when considering the role of honour in international relations, wrote that ‘Compelling linguistic evidence shows that, at least until 1914-18, honour was one of the key categories for British thinking about foreign policy.’[[7]](#footnote-7) In spite of these observations, such linguistic evidence has not been explored in the national sphere, and honour has not received the attention which its profile deserves.[[8]](#footnote-8) Some historians have confronted the challenge which a study of honour presents,[[9]](#footnote-9) yet it must be noted that while honour has received more attention in the last few decades, the history of honour, as Frank Henderson Stewart recorded, ‘has not been traced in any detail for even one of the languages, or the major countries, of Europe; the subject lies in a vast twilight, broken only by a few bright, but narrow, beams of light.’[[10]](#footnote-10)

It is my intention to shine some of these beams of light upon national honour today. This episode will be long, dense, more technical than my usual episodes, and you may even find it somewhat overwhelming. Yet, as I enter into the final stretch of my PhD, with my thesis due in September 2023, I believe it is time I shared with you what I’ve been doing for the last three and a half years. More importantly, for me personally, I want to show you why I’m excited about my research, and why I believe it is invaluable if we are to understand how Britons made foreign policy, and how they justified these policy decisions before the public.

The task is daunting, but the journey is fascinating, and it is also necessary, because removing national honour from the equation of foreign policy is akin to severing one of the main cultural and philosophical impulses of British and European thought. It is to look at foreign policy with only one eye open, and to miss the rich ideological debates which grounded and justified foreign policy, leaving only a bland husk of economics, strategy, or other material interests generally proposed to explain why contemporaries acted and reacted in the manner that they did. If you want to engage in this study by tracking down my sources for yourself, I would recommend downloading the script of this episode from its Patreon post. Maybe while you’re there you'll sign up for the year, and listen to our new twelve-part series examining AA relations from 1838-46, where national honour lurked menacingly in the background? Either way, thanks for joining me, and it would be my honour to talk about this subject further if you find yourself wanting more.

We can, for the sake of convenience, loosely define honour as a ‘right to respect’, but this is only a fraction of its actual meaning. Was honour merely a code of conduct, to be revered in public, but only half-heartedly in private, or was it something more – a powerful incentive to act, and a script which gentlemen adhered to? Did honour have real power, and have successive scholars failed to capture the essence of the era in question through their neglect of it as a study? In 1965, these questions moved the anthropologist John George Peristiany to compile the influential and ground-breaking volume of essays entitled *Honour and Shame, The Values of the Mediterranean Society.*[[11]](#footnote-11) The study was incredibly significant; it transcended traditional bounds of historical research by borrowing from anthropological, philosophical and social science spheres.[[12]](#footnote-12) Peristiany’s volume was well-received, with the essay from Julian Pitt-Rivers defining honour and social status a particular highlight.[[13]](#footnote-13) Thus impressed, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* noted that Peristiany’s book was ‘an interesting collection of partial studies and *a useful first step* in the assessment of the cultural realities of honour and shame.’[[14]](#footnote-14)

A useful first step indeed. Peristiany’s book is nearly six decades old, yet its influence upon the study of honour is palpable. It not only stimulated interest and debate within the field of anthropology, it also moved historians to apply Peristiany’s findings to their own research. One of the first historians to grapple with Peristiany’s work, and particularly Pitt-Rivers’ essay within said work, was Mervyn James, in his critically acclaimed 1978 book *English Politics and the Concept of Honour 1485-1642*.[[15]](#footnote-15) According to the *Journal of British Studies,* Mervyn James ‘blazed a trail’ that was followed by other historians, who saw in the code of honour an untapped subject with great potential, so that over the following two decades, additional studies in honour were published. By the mid-1990s, a ‘profusion of studies concerning the importance of honour had appeared’,[[16]](#footnote-16) and new contributions to the study of honour can be found as recently as Courtney Erin Thomas’ 2017 work *If I Lose Mine Honour I Lose Myself: Honour among the Early Modern English Elite*.[[17]](#footnote-17)

In spite of this activity though, honour as a term and as a subject of study remains contentious, and confusing. To begin with, a working, uniformly acceptable definition of honour has proved challenging to produce.[[18]](#footnote-18) Furthermore, any application of such a definition poses its own problems, as disagreement and debate continues over how honour functioned, and how it inhibited or enhanced the lives of those it touched. Perhaps because of these difficulties, honour studies have been surprisingly minimal and uneven, which moved Brendan Kane, in his study of honour in Britain and Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to observe that: ‘the study of honour in early modern England remains a rich field for research…’[[19]](#footnote-19) If early modern England remains a ‘rich field’ for research into the study of honour, then studies of honour in Victorian Era Britain must be considered something of an unexplored *gold mine*.

There remains, to date, no comprehensive survey of honour in Britain from its origins to the present day;[[20]](#footnote-20) one is also struck by the dearth of options in the modern period, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This gap in the historiography is especially striking considering the vast availability of literature for other regions. These include related studies of honour among American gentlemen in the south,[[21]](#footnote-21) among Russian elites in the Tsarist Empire,[[22]](#footnote-22) and one concerning honour in post-Napoleonic France[[23]](#footnote-23) – the very existence of such literature, and the lack of a British counterpart, surely recommends further study in the British sphere. In addition, those studies of British honour that do exist tend to focus on the early modern period [1500-1800], and in some cases the timeline is even more restricted.[[24]](#footnote-24) With some specific exceptions, the study of honour and what it meant to British aristocrats and statesmen in the Victorian Era represents a grey area in serious need of illumination.[[25]](#footnote-25) Additionally, while personal honour in modern British society remains underappreciated, examination of that other sphere of the code of honour, so significant in the nineteenth century – *national honour* – is almost entirely unexplored.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Perhaps, rather than search for such an elusive definition, it would be of more use to see how honour worked, and why it was believed to work in the way it did. To break honour down and understand its inner workings requires a methodology, but this task is not as difficult as might be expected, since other scholars have grappled with this question, and produced some ground-breaking findings. For the purposes of this episode, as in my thesis, we will be referring to the study on honour undertaken by Frank Henderson Stewart. I have chosen to use Stewart’s 1994 work *Honor* because I believe it presents the most convincing and precise explanation of honour readily available. To justify my high estimation of Stewart’s work and his theories, I will now provide a brief examination of his research in the context of the wider historiography on honour.

To begin with, Stewart’s 1994 conclusions were distinct from the broad consensus, which itself had been inherited from Peristiany’s aforementioned 1965 work *Honour and Shame*.[[27]](#footnote-27) Where Peristiany argued that an honour-based culture and its inherent values could be found most commonly in the Mediterranean,[[28]](#footnote-28) Stewart demonstrated ‘the importance of the conception of honour in non-Mediterranean Germany and England’, and he also showed ‘that the European concept of honour is similar in both northern and southern Europe.’[[29]](#footnote-29) But this was far from the sole difference. When Julian Pitt-Rivers examined honour in Peristiany’s edited volume, he presented it as a ‘bipartite’ idea, that is, it contains two sides, an inner and outer. The inner representing how the person sees themselves, the outer how society sees them. This model is fundamental to understanding how honour works. In its simplest form, Pitt-Rivers explained, honour is:

…the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his claim to pride, but it is also the acknowledgement of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his right to pride.[[30]](#footnote-30)

However, in Stewart’s view, there was more to honour than those elements which dealt with an inner personal morality or external societal reputation. Stewart used a brilliant example to tease out a particular problem with the definition of honour as it was then understood – if a gentleman is insulted by a false accusation, but no one witnessed this disrespect, has honour truly been lost? With no witnesses, the gentleman’s reputation would not be affected, and if he knows the insult to be false, what harm has actually been done? Of course, in this scenario the proud gentleman would still be offended, and feel his honour wounded, so Stewart endeavoured to discover what was missing, and he discerned that the problem lay with *entitlement*. A gentleman was entitled to honourable treatment, and would feel dishonoured by his opponent’s insult notwithstanding the audience, or lack thereof.[[31]](#footnote-31)

The solution to this dilemma, Stewart argues, is to think of honour not just as how an individual might *feel* about themselves, or merely what society *thinks* of them, but as the ‘right to be treated as having a certain worth’.[[32]](#footnote-32) Furthermore, Stewart explains that this right will be affected by one’s position in society. Honour did not have two spheres then, but three – it was a tripartite concept, consisting of inner, outer and, what Stewart called the claim-right. According to the segment of society one belonged to – a gentleman for instance – this person had a *right* to a certain treatment. Stewart broke these societal segments into what he called ‘honour-groups’, and the term effectively meant one’s social circle or class. According to Stewart, membership of an honour-group did not automatically entitle the gentleman or genteel woman to respect. A set of rules within that honour-group – *the code of honour* – would have to be consistently respected. In return for strict adherence to this code, the individual is considered an honoured and an equal member of this group.

Stewart’s work thus reduces honour into a more manageable set of ideas and values. It presents the person – for convenience sake, we shall call him the gentleman – as concerned with what others thought of him, and what he thought of himself, but also what his position entitled him to. His position was defined by the honour-group to which he belonged. The creation of the ‘honour-group’ device is a particularly important development in the theory of honour, because it enables the historian, anthropologist or philosopher to harness Stewart’s theory of honour and apply it to historical examples.[[33]](#footnote-33) Thus, a British Member of Parliament, as a member of the elite honour-group of Victorian high society, would possess a different code of honour to that of a coal miner; a monarch would possess a different code of honour to that of a gentleman, and so on. Stewart further clarifies that ‘Another possible way of defining the honour right would be to say that it is the right to be treated as a full or equal member of the honour-group.’[[34]](#footnote-34) Importantly, such membership was not a guarantee, as is illustrated by the fact that the aristocratic gentleman had to uphold the tenets of his peers; he had to adhere to the code of honour which both entitled him such respect, and protected him from the treatment which a commoner might receive.

Stewart’s new approach was sufficiently influential to move historical and anthropological studies on honour forward. They also enabled historians investigating more specific aspects of honour, such as female honour, to abandon the limited breadth of Pitt-Rivers’ study.[[35]](#footnote-35) Indeed, Courtney Thomas opined that following recent research in the field, Pitt-Rivers’ study and conclusions have been ‘wisely set aside’ in favour of a focus on specific historical cases.[[36]](#footnote-36) And Stewart provides further clarification:

The code of honour is a set of standards that has been picked out as having particular importance, that measures an individual’s worth along some profoundly significant dimensions; *and a member of the honour group who fails to meet these standards is viewed not just as inferior but often also as despicable*.[[37]](#footnote-37)

That was the other critical aspect of honour. For the gentleman, he did not fulfil honour’s tenets merely because it would be nice to feel respected and honoured in society. He did so because if he did not, he would violate the code of the honour-group he resided in. The penalties for this involved, essentially, social death, and this idea is itself ancient. We mentioned Ancient Greece earlier on, and if you’re curious as to how honour played a role in the lives of these peoples, the historian Paul Friedrich detailed how dire life could become for those that failed to uphold the honour code:

When those rules are breached the integrity of the individual is felt to be injured, shamed, mutilated, polluted, and so forth. One of the sharpest ways to dishonour an Iliadic man is through his women – particularly a wife or concubine – and the sane response of a man so treated may range from an apt insult, to homicide, to withdrawal, to a ritual of reconciliation…[[38]](#footnote-38)

The presence of women within the code of honour is a familiar sight, and its presence two thousand years before early modern English gentlemen would concern themselves with similar problems further underlines the longevity of honour’s tenets. Here, just as in the eighteenth century, women had to protect themselves from gossip which might call their sexual morality into question. Joseph Roisman, a historian of Alexander the Great,[[39]](#footnote-39) has demonstrated that a poor reputation in this regard was so damaging that it could even affect one’s ability to do business in the Ancient world, a lesson which would also have been familiar to an English businessman in the eighteenth century, where personal reputation affected one’s ability to acquire credit.[[40]](#footnote-40) Indeed, an Ancient Athenian law was developed specifically to protect those who frequented the Agora – where numerous women could be found – from ruinous slander which might place their reputation, and thus their livelihood, in jeopardy.[[41]](#footnote-41) The implications for incurring shame could be disastrous not merely for the male figure, but for the whole family, as Roisman elaborated further when quoting from the Ancient Athenian historian Xenophon:

When people pick sides for a ball game, such a person is often left unchosen, and in choral dancing he is sent off to the shameful positions. In the streets he has to step out of others’ way, and when it comes to seating, he must cede his even to younger men. At home he must support his unmarried female relatives, and he must put up with being blamed by them for their unmarried state. He must endure a hearth without a wife and yet he must pay the penalty for it. He must not walk about looking comfortable, or have the appearance of men beyond reproach; otherwise he must endure a beating from his betters.[[42]](#footnote-42)

To this striking picture, Sarah Pomeroy added that ‘since martial valour offered the sole path to the honour and respect of one’s peers, life was wretched for boys who were unable to cope with the rigours of military life’. Yet, such disgraced individuals could not simply hide – Pomeroy recorded that an effort was made to identify the disgraced, and stigmatise them as “tremblers”. Worse for these unfortunates, they were made easily distinguishable by the clothes they were forced to wear: ‘they were obliged to wear cloaks with coloured patches and to shave half their beards’. Such people were not allowed to stand for office, and the shame extended to their whole family, which counted against their sisters when it came time to marry.[[43]](#footnote-43) The honour code of the period was therefore merciless and uncompromising, and it dictated the expectations of the citizens who adhered to it.

Thus, for those that did adhere to their code of honour in Ancient Greece – most notably by distinction during battle – then ‘all men, young and old alike, honour him, and he goes to Hades having experienced much joy.’ This man would enjoy prestigious golden years, where he would be allowed to age gracefully, always with the respect of his peers, enjoying ‘…distinction amongst the people of his town, and no one wishes to do him harm in respect of his reputation or rights.’ Nor did the glories cease there; all citizens would ‘yield their seats to him, the young, those of his age, and his elders alike’, and it is this excellence which ‘…each man should now steel his heart to reach, with no cessation of hostilities.’[[44]](#footnote-44) There was thus a great incentive to acquire glory and renown in battle, and to be distinguished for your bravery when facing the enemy. Honour, therefore, could be a positive motivating factor, as it moved men to defend their homes with courage and tenacity, holding the line like an immovable phalanx.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Although the Victorian period does not contain such extremes of honour, there is a remarkable consistency in honour’s central tenets. It was no longer fashionable to duel to uphold one’s honour, and the decline of violence among Victorian gentlemen was an established fact, but there was still reason to fear being on the wrong side of one’s honour-group. A gentleman would be scorned, his business interests ridiculed, his friends deserting him as the doors of clubs would be shut in his face. It was, in short, a miserable position to be in, particularly where gossip was so rife, and news of your downfall could spread through society like wildfire. However, this exploration of personal honour and the inroads Frank Henderson Stewart made within it does come with a certain caveat.

To begin with, at no point in his study does Stewart venture to say that his model can be applied to the interactions between nations, and this is where challenges may arise. However, it should be said that national honour has never received sufficient attention to warrant its own methodology or model. There is also arguable value in seeing whether Stewart’s model can be applied to national honour, since this has not yet been tried. Whatever imperfections may accompany it from our analysis of national honour rather than personal honour, this should be seen as an important part of the process. Stewart provides us with a framework, in short, which national honour is desperately lacking, and I believe that where properly applied to different historical case studies, his methodology helps to reduce national honour to a point where its inner workings are easier to understand and explain. Furthermore, such difficulties, if they do emerge, are a result less of the unsuitability of Stewart’s theories for national honour necessarily, and a result instead of the generally underdeveloped and misunderstood status of national honour as a field of study. To rectify these shortcomings, it is necessary to experiment.

If you’re still lost, I will say that the best way to understand Stewart’s model of honour is to see it in action, which we will do later in the episode. A brief summary may be useful in any case, as in this episode we will apply Stewart’s model both to the Victorian gentleman, and to the British nation, the foremost power of the world at the time. Great Britain thus belonged to an honour-group all its own, yet it also clearly belonged to the honour-group of great European powers, who each possessed their own conceptions of national honour. Following Stewart’s lead then, so long as Britain remained in its great power honour-group, it should be respected and granted all the privileges due to its rank and reputation among the other powers. However, the onus was on the member of the group – whether a highly respected gentleman or a powerful nation – to adhere to the *code of honour* within that honour group. While in the case of the gentleman, the penalty for failing to do so would be disgrace and ostracism, in the case of the nation; shame, strategic isolation, vulnerability and, perhaps, disaster would follow any failure to uphold the tenets of the great power group’s code of honour.

It should go without saying that national honour borrowed much of its principles and logic from the personal honour of a gentleman. This should not be a surprise; the gentleman, after all, was tasked with governing nineteenth century Britain, directing its foreign policy, responding to threats, and revelling in its triumphs. However, we should bear in mind that there was no official moment of transition, where gentleman no longer spoke of their honour, and interpreted it only to be at stake within the nation. The transferral, if it can ever be said to have taken place, was both messy and gradual, in that gentlemen never stopped talking of their honour and reputations within high society, while they increasingly concerned themselves with the honour of the nation. Further, due to the considerable range of qualities and principles which both spheres held in common, it would be impossible to ignore one without considerable restrictions on the other. Having said that, I do intend to focus more intently on honour in the national sphere, since it is in an analysis of national honour that the most fascinating revelations come to light about nineteenth century British foreign policy.

National honour was affected by Victorian cultural traditions and a range of ideas which allowed it to persist and thrive. The potency of honour as a value system, indeed, was bolstered by the existing Victorian notions of manliness and masculinity, which were exchanged between the personal and national spheres of honour.[[46]](#footnote-46) Indeed, the importance of prestige as an idea becomes immediately apparent, because prestige was frequently linked with the national honour, much as the honour of a gentleman was consistently mentioned alongside his reputation.[[47]](#footnote-47) Ideas like gentlemanly capitalism,[[48]](#footnote-48) codes of morality,[[49]](#footnote-49) nationalist ideology,[[50]](#footnote-50) imperialism,[[51]](#footnote-51) and Victorian political culture all help to inform national honour’s ethos.[[52]](#footnote-52) These schools of history represent branches of the historiography which the scholar must tend to if national honour’s impact is to be comprehensively known and explained. Yet, we should not be intimidated by such a wide range of issues coming under national honour’s umbrella. I would argue that national honour’s great boon is that it is observable; a glance at nineteenth century British foreign policy reveals it to be constantly at work.

This is because the gentleman and the nation had to be on guard, as they were either looking for ways to uphold their honour, or they were trying to defend it from attack. The state, like the gentleman, could withstand no insults, and if the state, like the gentleman, wished to be taken seriously, then it would have to contest all challenges, however apparently unimportant. ‘Above all’, wrote Charles Barber in his analysis of honour in Shakespearean drama, ‘a gentleman must be sensitive to insult and injury, and be prepared to rebuff and revenge them without hesitation; failure to do so will lead to loss of good name.’[[53]](#footnote-53) Just as a gentleman could have prestige or ‘credit’, and would suffer in society should it decline, so too would a state become subject to isolation, and potentially an attack launched by an opportunistic rival, should its prestige fall low enough.[[54]](#footnote-54) This was the underlying ideology which supported the code of honour in both spheres – that if one failed to defend honour, disaster would follow. For this reason, the national honour was frequently linked with security, and often with the national interest.[[55]](#footnote-55) If a nation was insulted, or if a gentleman was given offence, each could solve the problem by showing strict concern their honour, most commonly through violence. For the gentleman, this manifested itself in the duel, but for the nation, the solution was to seek satisfaction by acquiring a public, official apology, and if that failed, war was the sole recourse.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Prestige, credit, morality and honour were contrasted with insult, challenge, dishonour and shame, and these positive and negative terms form the foundational lexicon or language patterns of honour’s code.[[57]](#footnote-57) As noted, the key ingredient which all variants of the code of honour have in common is that of violence.[[58]](#footnote-58) This was because, as Julian Pitt-Rivers appreciated, ‘the ultimate vindication of honour lies in physical violence,’[[59]](#footnote-59) and to govern this violence with a degree of finesse and safety, a duelling tradition grew from Renaissance Italy.[[60]](#footnote-60) In the personal sphere then, when a gentleman’s honour was at stake, a duel might suffice,[[61]](#footnote-61) but as Ute Frevert observed, in the case of insults inflicted upon nations, a state may declare war to recoup its lost honour: ‘War thus resembled the duel, except that it was fought not between two men, but between millions.’[[62]](#footnote-62) This comparison between warfare and the duel represents an additional overlap between the personal and national spheres of honour, and it was an overlap which contemporaries were cognisant of in the nineteenth century.[[63]](#footnote-63)

Nor did the overlapping cease with comparisons between a duel or a war; we might say further that the commonality in the lexicon of honour points to a sharing of values, responsibilities, consequences, and benefits between the personal and national spheres. The question we must address then, is how and why personal honour transferred so much of its logic to the nation? And wouldn’t you know it, this period of history is also surprisingly fuzzy. At some point, historians assert, the national sphere borrowed from the personal in order to personalise what it meant to be a citizen, and service to the state became a source of national pride. A key ingredient in this development was the French Revolution and the two decades of war which followed, a fact which was observed by Ute Frevert, who wrote:

Politicians, diplomats, officers, and public opinion did not speak in their own name; rather, they spoke on behalf of the ‘nation’, the ‘fatherland’, the state, the country. It was ‘us’ rather than ‘I’, ‘our’ honour rather than ‘mine’ that was at stake. A code of conduct, a concept of behaviour that had been utterly individualistic (though rooted in and backed by social groups) was thus collectivised.[[64]](#footnote-64)

We must bear in mind that although Frevert presents this idea, historians have yet to complete a comprehensive investigation into how this ‘transfer of honour’, from the personal to the national sphere, took place, but a range of theories do exist.[[65]](#footnote-65) My own understanding is that a transferral of some kind certainly occurred; a search of national honour in the *British Newspaper Archive* shows that the ethic skyrocketed in popularity during the first half of the nineteenth century, before gradually declining, and effectively vanishing altogether after 1914. Allen Hertz proposed the theory that personal honour became national honour through the royal person of the monarch, who identified closely with the honour of the nation, and viewed the maintenance of it as their responsibility.[[66]](#footnote-66) James Bowman believed this transferral process occurred thanks in large part to the literature of the period, with the novels of Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) presenting ideas of chivalric honour to an early modern audience.[[67]](#footnote-67) As Bowman noted, ‘…the Victorians…produced an accommodation between old-fashioned chivalry and the forces of modernity that reached its highest development with the ideal of the Christian gentleman.’[[68]](#footnote-68)

Geoffrey Best interpreted this accommodation as a more gradual process, writing that it was through the Victorians ‘…that our central strand of honour had directly descended from earlier ages and it was by them, in each successive generation, that it was articulated into precise social forms and usages.’[[69]](#footnote-69) Certainly, Best concedes, references to national honour or love of the nation was nothing new, however, ‘none of this had in it the new depths of national meaning which were opened up by political revolution in France and cultural revolution in Germany.’[[70]](#footnote-70) Is it possible to argue that at some point, a watershed moment in the development of honour occurred? Indeed, this was discerned by Norman Hampson, who wrote:

The rule of Napoleon was to show that revolutionary patriotism, shorn of its democratic and egalitarian aspects and of its dedication to virtue, had assumed some of the characteristics of aristocratic honour and transferred them from the individual to the nation-state… Honour was now national rather than personal.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Yet, there is something unsatisfactory and unearned in such conclusions. For one, we know that personal honour continued to matter to the British gentleman up until at least 1914; his sense of honour was not simply replaced by the national sphere.[[72]](#footnote-72) It would be more correct to note that national honour *superseded* personal honour in importance, yet even this claim is not evenly borne out, and remains incomplete as a topic for research. Does sufficient evidence exist, furthermore, to justify the identification of the French Revolution as a watershed moment for honour? Indeed, the best that Geoffrey Best could manage was to state that ‘Sooner or later, somehow or other, a common style of high nationalist sentiment suffused them all’. Granted, such nationalist sentiments were rife during the Victorian Era, but to declare that the nation-state was abruptly presented less as an abstract idea, and more ‘as a super-person with all the personal attributes of body, blood, guts, mind, spirit, conscience, soul and honour,’ at some point in its duration, rings hollow.[[73]](#footnote-73)

In 1914, the old culture of honour collided with industrialised warfare on a total scale, causing honour’s adherents and advocates to decline sharply in numbers, and creating a cultural disconnect between the era before 1914, and the period which came after.[[74]](#footnote-74) This contrast in values and traditions between modern society and the cultures of the pre-1914 world suggested there was more which could be learned, and indeed this belief moved James Joll to research the period that preceded the First World War, as part of his seminal work investigating that conflict’s origins. Joll soon emerged with the label ‘unspoken assumptions’, to describe the understated beliefs which historians have tended to gloss over, and of which the code of honour formed an integral part.[[75]](#footnote-75) As Joll perceived it, the very fact that ‘…prestige, reputation, honour are *ends*, over which everyone was in substantial agreement,’ meant that ‘There was no need to discuss them.’ This in itself presents us with a difficulty. For the very reason that honour before 1914 was comprised of a belief system which virtually all accepted, individuals did not always speak of it as clearly as they could, hence Joll’s decision to label them ‘unspoken assumptions’ in the first place.[[76]](#footnote-76) Where they did speak of national honour on almost all occasions though, was in the public presentation and defence of foreign policy, a point we’ll come to later.

However, honour’s status as lying under the radar of cultural and political debate means that even while it was taken to be a self-evident truism of nineteenth century politics, this status has seemed to count against it as a topic for research. It thus remains to clarify and demystify this pedestal on which honour was placed. ‘Honour’, wrote the historian John A. Lynn, ‘is a formidable concept. One of the most complex terms in the English language, it encompasses several levels of meaning, rich in moral connotations and emotional overtones.’[[77]](#footnote-77) On another occasion, Lynn wrote that to try and understand the seventeenth century without weighing the influence of war and military institutions would be ‘like trying to dance without listening to the music.’[[78]](#footnote-78) I believe it is possible to connect Lynn’s two statements here; honour was immensely complex, but it was also an essential part of the ‘music’ of the nineteenth century, which successive historians have failed to notice or appreciate, to the detriment of their studies. I believe that this gap in the historiography must be filled if we are to grasp the full measure of the Victorian Era’s significance and events, and hopefully by the end of this episode, we will have gone some way towards addressing this gap.

National honour was the outgrowth of a nineteenth century blend of nationalism, patriotism and the personalisation of the nation, and just as honour had governed relations between gentlemen, now *national honour* would affect relations between states.[[79]](#footnote-79) It was not that personal honour became nationalised, but that the nation became more personal for British citizens. Or, as Barry O’Neill described it: ‘Two national states treat each other as if they were persons, exchanging insults, issuing challenges, and retaliating against wrongs in the name of "national honour”’.[[80]](#footnote-80) However, as we said, national honour was not a nineteenth century invention; and national honour’s new precedence had not made honour in the personal sphere suddenly obsolete. Victorian gentlemen were still expected to uphold the dictates of honour; during a public lecture delivered in 1865, the Liberal politician and journalist J. Boyd Kinnear would assert that ‘The very first element in the character of a gentleman is…that he must be honourable’, and Kinnear added:

You cannot say of a man that he is gentlemanly, and yet, in the same sentence, say that he is dishonourable. You will therefore see that honour is an essential ingredient in the character of a gentleman… It is not merely that he is never false, but that the reproach of falsehood should be so abhorrent to him that he would almost give his life's blood to have it wiped out. Honour is thus the sublimation of truth, it is the delicate flower into which truth and justice expand, and which fades, and withers, and falls, the moment the stem is wounded or bruised.[[81]](#footnote-81)

Honour still dictated how men and women interacted,[[82]](#footnote-82) and there was even a ‘scale of honour among clothes, which must not be forgotten’, and which advised, for instance, that ‘There is more honour…in a uniform with a bullet hole in it than one without.’[[83]](#footnote-83) Men, furthermore, were advised not to dress too ostentatiously, since ‘The best jewel a man can wear is his honour. Let that be bright and shining, and all others must darken before it.’[[84]](#footnote-84) ‘A gentleman’, it was said, was also expected to have ‘a perfect control over his temper’. It was true, opined one manual on gentlemanly behaviour, that ‘Society has undergone changes and modifications in this respect since duelling has gone out of fashion’, yet it was also doubtful ‘whether the most famous duellists were ever the truest gentlemen.’[[85]](#footnote-85)

One could argue that the demands of honour among gentlemen changed, as society became generally less violent. If the rule of law developed to protect the gentleman and his reputation though, *international law* had not yet reached a point where the national honour would be similarly guarded. Agonising over national honour’s vulnerable status was a constant exercise of nineteenth century statesmen, because so much was perceived to be at stake. The pinnacle of this honour culture among gentlemen and nations was arguably the First World War, where scholars, including myself, have denoted the pivotal role which the code of honour played in how states behaved during that crisis.[[86]](#footnote-86) Ute Frevert provides an excellent summary of how this language of national honour played out in 1914, and this long but detailed extract captures what made that ethic so powerful and dangerous at such a pivotal moment in human history:

The military – who became more and more influential as the crisis [of 1914] evolved – thought of honour as their ‘inviolable possession.’ The diplomatic corps, whose ranks were mostly filled with aristocrats, was equally bathed in honour, and so were the politicians who eventually decided on war and peace or advised the heads of state (mostly monarchs) on the decision. Not surprisingly, the interaction within and between these groups in July and August 1914 was intensely marked by the language of honour. It was not only the word itself that, as quoted above, was used time and again in official, semi-official and secret communication. Other concepts and practices that were part of the lexicon of honour were even more frequently employed and alluded to. ‘Humiliation’, ‘insult’, ‘shame’, ‘challenge’, ‘satisfaction’, ‘offence’ – there was barely a telegram or a conversation that did not include these notions. Every member of the upper (middle) classes in Europe could easily identify them as what they were: components of the early modern language of honour that had focused on the practice of duelling. Even in countries like Great Britain where the duel had fallen out of fashion since mid-century, the language was still spoken and understood. On the other hand though, the subject of honour and shame as it was addressed in this communication was no longer the male individual (and members of a respective status group); instead it was the nation. Politicians, diplomats, officers, and public opinion did not speak in their own name; rather, they spoke on behalf of the ‘nation’, the ‘fatherland’, the state, the country. It was ‘us’ rather than ‘I’, ‘our’ honour rather than ‘mine’ that was at stake. A code of conduct, a concept of behaviour that had been utterly individualistic (though rooted in and backed by social groups) was thus collectivised. The nation, i.e. the citizens of a given state, had become the target of insults and offences and was called upon to defend itself. It could do so by issuing a ‘challenge’ and engaging in a fight that was meant to restore its honour. On national terms, the challenge amounted to a declaration of war, and through war, the humiliating insult could be washed away.[[87]](#footnote-87)

It seems reasonable to view 1914 as the peak of national honour’s influence and impact then, but what did Ute Frevert believe had led us to this point? She identified in the militarisation of society during and after the French Revolution a signal change in how citizens saw themselves and the country they had served, writing:

What had actually happened during and after the French Revolution can be described as two closely intertwined developments: the nationalisation of politics and the nationalisation of war. First, enthroning the nation as sovereign meant transforming politics from the business of the government (i.e. the King’s cabinet) into the concern of (male) citizens who, through their elected representatives, took decisions in war and politics… nationalist ideas turned out to be powerful means of evoking feelings of belonging and antagonism. Propaganda evoking ‘national honour’ had a strong feedback. Public opinion as it was expressed in daily papers, party rallies and demonstrations depicted a high degree of sensibility and vulnerability when it dealt with alleged attacks against its honour… Whenever a government called on its citizens to join the armed forces, it helped to nationalise war.[[88]](#footnote-88)

As I said, there is no way at this moment to definitively state what happened to honour that led it to become entwined with the nation, but historians have done their best to explain it, and until the subject receives greater attention and scrutiny, this working theory is the best explanation we have. It also supplemented by the literal handful of historians who have tried to delve deeper into the idea. For instance, in his examination of national honour and IR, in the only survey of its kind, Allen Hertz tried to provide his own explanation of national honour’s proliferation throughout Europe:

…such references to national honour became increasingly common, especially in France, Britain and the few other countries where control of foreign policy was gradually shifting to a governing class which, according to British diplomat and historian Harold Nicolson (1886-1968), developed a corresponding feeling that "engagements entered into by the government pledged the honour of the class as a whole." Similarly, British historian A.J.P. Taylor (1906-1990) observed that pre-1914 treaties were no longer simply between monarchs, but "absorbed by public opinion" and therefore also between nations.[[89]](#footnote-89)

As usual in history, it was a range of factors, from war and mobilisation, to the drip down process of elites identifying their personal honour with the honour of the nation, and a democratisation within society which enabled more of these elites to acquire power and see their position in this light. What I want you to focus on though are the principles national honour forced statesmen to abide by. It was not just that British statesmen were forced to consider the national honour privately; they also had to publicly justify decisions in the context of the national honour. A major reason for this is that political opponents publicly attacked and challenged their policies based on their interpretations of wounded, endangered, or declining national honour. If these attacks landed, the increasingly politically active and literate British public would condemn their government along those lines Ute Frevert mentioned: that *Britain* had been dishonoured, humiliated, shamed, disgraced. No government could survive for long, the belief in Britain went, if it had neglected its duty to the nation in this manner, and this domestic political pressure was another reason for such angst about the national honour.

However, while domestic pressures to maintain national honour was one element, another was the consistently repeated fear that a damaged national honour would imperil national security. How do we explain such an idea? If we take British statesmen at their word, then there seems to have been an ingrained belief about how damaged national honour would lead to a series of other disasters, until Britain was abandoned by her allies, facing revolts in her colonies, and vulnerable to invasion at home by opportunistic rivals. To us, this might seem ludicrous – would Britain’s status as the premier naval and economic power not keep the Empire intact? – but the actual cause and effect formula between a damaged honour and ruined nation was so consistently expressed, that some have taken to calling national honour a script, which British leaders would have to follow, lest the consequences all had feared would follow. In Avner Offer’s 1995 article ‘Going to War in 1914: A Matter of Honour?’ the author investigates ‘honour as a code of conduct on the threshold of war.’[[90]](#footnote-90) Offer proposed ‘It can be seen as a script, which follows a prescribed sequence,’ adding, ‘Honour is a quality assumed to be in the possession of individuals and groups until it is challenged and questioned; some experience or episode is interpreted as a challenge to honour.’ When this challenge is received, Offer determined, the nation must act to defend its honour:

The remedy is violence, in the case of nation-states, preceded by the polite manoeuvres and language of diplomacy. If ‘satisfaction’ is denied, there is a loss of reputation, status, honour. The violence is then redirected and internalised as humiliation and shame.[[91]](#footnote-91)

‘The code of honour,’ Offer continued, ‘is a cultural script, but it would be wrong to regard it as irrational.’[[92]](#footnote-92) Such a claim may appear nonsensical; where was the rationale in displaying such a heightened sensitivity to insult, or demanding satisfaction in cases where no insult was even intended? Yet, Offer’s ‘script’ presented a logic which remained largely consistent across Western Europe. An honourable man, much like an honourable nation, must respond to insult or be perceived as weak, vulnerable to exploitation or even attack by opportunistic rivals. If we want to explore this idea further and see it in action, we can look at how national honour factored into the considerations of nineteenth century statesmen in their formulation and enacting of foreign policy. Some historians have begun this task, and focused on specific case-studies with national honour in mind, such as the Opium War.[[93]](#footnote-93) But we must go deeper, and assess a range of cases which illuminate the inner workings of honour within foreign policy,[[94]](#footnote-94) including how honour was understood, applied, and articulated by contemporaries. To see national honour at work in these case studies, we must ask both where it was interpreted as being at stake or under threat, and how contemporaries used national honour to justify their behaviour or policies.

To achieve such a goal, it is necessary to examine statements and speeches by contemporaries which were made in public, the so-called public sphere. The public sphere contained parliamentary debates, public speeches, and newspaper articles, and it is here that national honour was explored, debated, and disseminated to a remarkable degree. By contrast, a study which focuses on private sources, such as official documents, private correspondence, diaries, or other personal papers lacks the depth necessary to complete a proper exploration of national honour’s form and function. Searching for that nugget from those private sources where national honour might be justified or explained by one Victorian statesman to another is not merely like looking for a needle in a haystack, it is also incredibly unrewarding. Since national honour was taken as undeniable, British officials rarely if ever saw the need to explain its inner workings to their colleagues in private. It was only when they talked of national honour publicly, for the benefit of the reading public and their own careers, that national honour’s profile was actively drawn out.

Perhaps because national honour was perceived to be popular, and a source of public approval, contemporaries refrained from openly criticising it, and preferred to argue that it was not at stake in each crisis, or that political opponents were misrepresenting it. This provoked additional debates on national honour’s existence, and required that contemporaries recognised its presence, even if they disagreed with its interpretation. What is left as a consequence is a rich catalogue of evidence, never before analysed or assessed in the context of British foreign policy. We see contemporaries defend national honour’s importance, explain its powers, explain its exclusion from a crisis, or attack their opponents for undermining it on a grand scale. Because I tasked myself with analysing these exchanges and debates, my PhD research might be categorised as a study of rhetoric, alongside other such studies that assess public foreign policy debates over British and French imperialism,[[95]](#footnote-95) of Russian threats to India,[[96]](#footnote-96) of the European threat to Britain’s position,[[97]](#footnote-97) and of discussions about the Empire within late nineteenth century British politics.[[98]](#footnote-98) ‘Rhetorics’, as Phillip Fisher states, ‘are signs of the play of forces within cultural life and ... (have) the power of innovation. They are the signs of what is uncertain and potential in culture. Rhetoric is the mark of temporary location and justification.’[[99]](#footnote-99)

There is no need to get more technical than that, but I do appreciate that some of you find the sources I use very interesting, since I went on something of a journey during the course of this PhD where sources were concerned. Because the sources you access flavour the outcome of your research, it was important to me that I was clear both about who I was recording, and what impact this would have on my conclusions. It should also be said that as my PhD took place during the pandemic, accessing archival material became impossible, and improvisation was necessary. Pivoting towards public sources took some time for me to accept, because I didn’t want my research to consist only of what people said, I wanted to know what they *thought*. However, measuring thought and sincerity is a difficult business, and I eventually realised that it would be more useful if my research had a clearer focus. Rather than looking at how important national honour was to British foreign policymakers or what impact it had on their decisions, it dawned on me that a more accurate thesis could be made if I changed direction somewhat.

So, rather than ask how important national honour was, my supervisor pointed me towards looking above all at how it was *used*. How did contemporaries make use of national honour in their public defence and criticism of foreign policy? What kinds of ideas and decisions was national honour associated with? What were some of the difficulties presented by national honour’s popular profile in the public estimation, particularly when a strictly honourable policy clashed with the realities of British interests? If all this has gone over your head, don’t worry. It took me some time to absorb what it all means, and I sometimes still find myself worrying that I’ll tie myself up in philosophical knots, and miss the actual significance of what I’m researching here. Perhaps a comparison will clarify some things. In Mark Hampton’s study of patriotism and the press during the Second Boer War,[[100]](#footnote-100) Hampton considered how the concept of patriotism was discussed and debated in the public sphere, noting a campaign by C. P. Scott, the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, to redefine what it meant to be both a patriot and patriotic by the 1880s. Similarly, my plan is to examine how national honour was spoken of during British foreign policy debates, and you would be amazed at how frequently it appeared.

This leads me to my next point; the period I’ll be covering today, to give you a snapshot of my research and bring forward my key findings so far. I have already mentioned that my thesis makes use of case studies, which are each an exploration of different foreign policy crises during the mid-Victorian Era. Divided into chapters, chapter one tackles the fundamentals of national honour, and sets the scene for that ethic, explaining its meaning, structure and application, but I believe we’ve spent enough time on that. So, Chapters Two and Three examine the whole train of British foreign policy during 1830-1850, spending time on several miniature crises therein. Chapter Four examines the Trent Affair of 1861-62. Chapter Five looks at the Schleswig-Holstein crisis of 1864, and Chapter Six examines a period fifteen years later, during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877, wherein Benjamin Disraeli reframed national honour as prestige, and presented his foreign policy according to its demands and tenets – or what he perceived them to be.

We have visited some of these events already; a series already exists on the Trent Affair, and a Patreon series now ongoing examines AA relations during 1838-46, which was a time of intense diplomatic crisis between the two nations, who each grappled with presenting national honour to their publics. Bismarck Rise brought us into the Schleswig-Holstein crisis, though we only looked at that event from Bismarck’s perspective, and missed the crisis in confidence which followed Britain’s decision to refrain from intervening, which frustrated some contemporaries who believed Palmerston had promised British aid to the beleaguered Danes, thus incurring an obligation which it would be a dishonour to renege upon. BGTW looked at Disraeli’s premiership during the Russo-Turkish War, though we focused less on prestige and more on the conflict between Disraeli and his FS Lord Derby over what Britain’s priorities should be. Of course, this episode is already enormous, and we simply don’t have the space or time to get into serious depth with any of these cases today, but what I can do is give you a survey of my research so far, and explain how national honour featured in these events, what themes of national honour were brought forward, what ideas were associated with it, and how contemporaries were affected by its very public use.

But you may still be mystified by national honour, and to fix this, we’re going to have to take ourselves out of the current system of IR, where national honour has long since vanished. Viewing national honour as a curious relic of the nineteenth century underrates its actual importance to contemporaries, who certainly did not view its tenets as optional, but as a belief system which guided state policy. This did not mean national honour was straightforward, though. In November 1835, the *Satirist* newspaper asked ‘What is national honour? Wherein does it lie? When was it invented, and by what nation?’ Did national honour ‘bear any resemblance to the honour of an individual? If it does, where are we to look for the seat of honour?’ If it was insulted, then ‘How many aggressions amount to pulling the nose of a nation?’ And if such insults were not grounds for war, then ‘What proceedings on the part of a foreign Court may be construed into treading on our toes without an apology?[[101]](#footnote-101)’

In March 1839, the liberally-inclined weekly paper *The Era* encapsulated national honour’s cause-and-effect formula when it noted that ‘The strength of a nation does not merely consist in its material means, but resides chiefly in that estimate which is formed of it by other states.’ *The Era* underlined how ‘Self-respect’ was ‘in a nation the first essential for its prosperity, greatness, and even safety.’ And a nation which possessed it was ‘impressed with a due sense of its dignity, which it evinces by a watchful care of its rights, and the promptness with which it sustains or vindicates the national honour.’ It warned that ‘Indifference or neglect of these considerations are the precursors to the downfall of a nation’, and it clarified that ‘The national honour is not alone affected by insults, but also in a violation of right, or an infraction of treaty’ without ‘speedy reparation or adequate redress to the injured party.’ As soon as a nation ‘has been so wanting to itself as to submit and succumb in a single instance, it encourages a repetition of the injury, and invites similar aggressions from others.’ The nation then had to respond to this lapse in security, ‘But what was once easy becomes then next to impossible; for, having tamely suffered injury and the deprivation of its rights from all’, *The Era* concluded, ‘all are equally interested in opposing it.’ It was thus clear ‘that a strict regard to national honour is the best safeguard of our interests. Without it, no alliance can be stable’, and ‘nothing is secure.’[[102]](#footnote-102)

As *The Era* professed, Britain was a great power *because* of her national honour, whether from her sense of self-respect, the reputation of her arms, or a sensitivity to insult. A decline in these traits would be interpreted as a sign of weakness, and an invitation to Britain’s rivals to take advantage of her. Since so much apparently depended upon national honour’s maintenance, contemporaries placed it on an exclusive pedestal. In particular, the philosophy of former Foreign Secretary Charles James Fox [1749-1806] regarding national honour was frequently alluded to in Parliament, and during a debate on Portugal in 1830, the radical reformer Sir Francis Burdett emphasised that ‘whenever our honour was concerned’, Britain ‘should be always ready to stand forward in its defence, and that unless we did so, we should be no longer fit to hold, and we could not keep, our station in the eyes of the world.’ Sir Robert Peel agreed that ‘of all the just causes of war, the vindication of the honour of a country was that which was most just.’ Peel said that he ‘concurred most cordially with the doctrine of Mr Fox’, to the effect that ‘the best vindication which a country could plead for embarking in war was, that it was necessary to the vindication of the national honour.’[[103]](#footnote-103)

Over a decade later, this prioritisation of national honour was repeated by Lord Brougham, a prominent Whig reformer and writer who also served as Lord High Chancellor. Brougham asserted that ‘anything affecting the honour of a country is always of importance’, before invoking Charles Fox’s philosophy once again, as Fox had ‘once wisely and profoundly observed’ that while he could ‘never approve a war for profit, a war for the maintenance of honour was a very different thing, for the sacrifice of national honour must lead to the downfall of the country.’[[104]](#footnote-104) Brougham returned to this theme a few years later in reference to British relations with America, once more citing Fox, who had said to his peers that ‘“it is when the honour of a country is concerned; it is when that honour and that name, which every independent powerful country, unconquered and unconquerable like this, must preserve untouched and pure”’, and it was ‘“to preserve that honour unassailed, and that name untarnished, that alone the dreadful extremity of war should be had recourse to."’[[105]](#footnote-105)

Mindful of the primacy of national honour, it is little surprise that contemporaries insisted on supporting it. The best means to do so was through sufficient forces on land and sea, since according to former admiral and veteran of Trafalgar Sir Edward Codrington, a weakness in these forces meant ‘we were unable to send forth instantly on the commission of an offence a squadron to repel an insult offered, come from what quarter it might.’ It was because of this deficiency that Codrington believed ‘that the navy was treated in a way unbecoming the character of this country.’[[106]](#footnote-106) But responding to insult was merely one aspect of national honour, and Palmerston believed that ‘the best test of whether countries or individuals were properly upholding their own honour was, when they found other countries or persons applying to them on matters in which their honour also was concerned.’ Where those ‘powerful nations were willing to accept the mediation of England on matters which concerned their honour’, Palmerston insisted that ‘Ministers might be justly entitled to affirm’, that they ‘had maintained peace without any dereliction of honour, and that the respect paid to England by the other nations of the world had gone on increasing instead of diminishing.’[[107]](#footnote-107) Palmerston referred to here to the idea of arbitration, but the prospect of a third party arbitrating a matter of honour between two other states was rare and difficult, as we’ll see later on.

National honour could also contain a moral question, such as the abolition of slavery, and thus in 1833 the Whig Prime Minister Earl Grey asked that ‘If it was necessary to resist foreign encroachment, to defend the honour and interest of the country by war’, then was it ‘less necessary to uphold the honour and the character of the country’ by ‘abolishing from every portion of the British dominions the odious condition of slavery, so abhorrent to the principles of the Constitution, as well as to the breast of every Englishman?’[[108]](#footnote-108) Morally repugnant behaviour was shameful, and few acts were more distasteful than the abandonment of British obligations. In 1847, Whig Prime Minister Lord Russell could thus boast that ‘There is no treaty the stipulations of which it can be imputed to England that she has violated, evaded, or set at nought.’ Russell asserted that Britain was prepared, ‘in the face of Europe, however inconvenient some of those stipulations may be, to hold ourselves bound, by all our engagements’, and ‘to keep the fame, and the name, and the honour of the Crown of England unsullied, and to guard that unsullied honour as a jewel which we will not have tarnished.’[[109]](#footnote-109)

However, where Britain was in the wrong, it was no shame to admit fault, as Lord Brougham explained in 1839 during a debate on the rebellion in Canada by assuring the Lords that while he would not counsel any policy ‘that was calculated in any way to lower the honour or character of this country’, Britain’s position ‘made it proper, prudent, and safe for us, without any possibility of reproach’, and ‘without having our honour in the smallest degree soiled, or tarnished, or reflected on’, to ‘lower as much as possible our demands, in order that we might secure, he repeated, without blemish to our honour, the inestimable blessing of peace.’ Such a peace should be the government’s guiding aim, and when Britain was ‘manifestly in the wrong’ – just as when ‘a nation or a man was in the wrong’ – for Britain ‘to acknowledge error did not make the case of either worse.’[[110]](#footnote-110)

As you can see then, national honour contained a wide range of ideas under its umbrella. It is in many ways remarkable that contemporaries were able to keep apace with all the ideas it contained, though they certainly struggled with its application at times. Broadly though, from what I’ve seen, it is possible to view national honour as existing in two distinct states. The first version of national honour was that it was endangered, and needed to be upheld. This idea was most commonly articulated in the context of obligations, where Britain’s statesmen had made a commitment to support or defend an ally, and was thus required to do so to fulfil her promises. No matter how daunting the task or beleaguered the ally in question, national honour demanded that Britain fulfil these obligations, or else other nations would put less faith in her word in the future. This was a mirror image of that claim that a gentleman’s word was his bond, and we see it in the debates of 1914, where the British treaty with Belgium meant that she was obliged to rush to her defence. ‘National honour’ David Lloyd George declared in September 1914, ‘is a reality, and any nation that disregards it is doomed.’[[111]](#footnote-111)

But the other state of national honour was arguably even more explosive. When it was claimed that the national honour was tarnished, damaged, or insulted by a rival power, this got contemporaries on edge, as they pushed for what was called satisfaction or redress. Again, this is a mirror image of those gentlemen who pushed for satisfaction through a duel when offended by their peers, and just like the gentleman’s case, nations had to acquire satisfaction either by wresting an apology from the offending power, or, when that was not provided, satisfaction could be acquired by war. But why? Where did the pressure to act in this manner come from? Again, the aforementioned script which nations adhered to provided the justification. If the nation failed to acquire satisfaction, and allowed the insults to go unanswered, then would other rivals not begin to believe that Britain could be insulted at will? Would they not threaten British citizens abroad, safe in the knowledge that whatever Britain said, she would not act? Would not other European powers take advantage of this perceived weakness and unwillingness to defend her honour, by launching an even greater attack upon her?

Contemporaries in Britain were loud in their denunciation of policies which allowed insults to go unanswered, or hesitated in demanding satisfaction because of a fear of war. Constant comparisons were also made to Britain’s glory days, which generally meant its performance in the NWs, and where no insults would be tolerated for long. Thus, in an 1833 debate on Poland, Tory stalwart the Duke of Buckingham reflected how ‘Time was, when the hour for demanding redress was the hour in which the injury was received’, and ‘when years were not consumed in fruitless negotiations and endless protocols’, but ‘when justice was demanded in a tone that could not be mistaken, and redress insisted on in a spirit that could not be dismayed.’[[112]](#footnote-112) A failure to sustain the national honour would cause a decline in British prestige, and thus in 1838, the *Morning Herald* warned that ‘England’ was ‘rapidly sinking to the level of a third-rate power’, and it could not imagine ‘any degree of abasement’, to which ‘the present rulers of the country would not submit, rather than attempt to vindicate the honour of England in the way in which the honour of England was wont to be vindicated.’

The *Morning Herald* continued with a blistering attack on ‘our political pedlars’, since ‘compared with the costliness of war, what in their eyes are national honour, or the rank which England may hereafter hold among the nations?’ Britain was on course to lose this rank, because ‘There will be no war, therefore, with Russia, let Russia do what she may’ since ‘public virtue, national honour, the pride of independence, have no charms for our present race of rulers.’ These rulers were more interested in money-making, and ‘The economists, and their tools in office, will never consent to a war with Russia, on a plea, so frivolous in their eves, as national honour!’ And the *Herald* warned ‘No regard to national honour will ever impel the ruling faction to defend England against the aggressions of a powerful enemy!’[[113]](#footnote-113)

A failure to defend national honour from attack encouraged attack from watchful rivals, as the radical reformer Thomas Attwood warned in 1839, reflecting that in Russia’s attack on Poland, ‘There was no sound of English vengeance—no vindication of English honour by the Whigs.’ While ‘One would cost us four-farthings, the other three-farthings’, Attwood lamented that ‘the Whigs at once said, "Let English honour go to the winds, and let us save our farthings." If Britain would only ‘put ourselves in fitting order’, Attwood was ‘convinced the Russians would never dare to attack us’, yet if she remained ‘unprotected’, then he predicted a ‘burning insult from the Russians next summer’, and even a ‘Russian fleet’ which ‘might enter the mouth of the Thames’.[[114]](#footnote-114)

Of course, no Russian fleet appeared outside London in 1840, but hyperbole notwithstanding, Attwood insisted that a failure to respond to insult – interpreted in this case in Russia’s treaty violations – would only encourage bolder assaults on British interests in the future. Attwood was consistent in this position, and during the 1832 hustings for Birmingham he had declared that ‘his grand object would be to protect the national honour’ Attwood intended to ‘take care, as far as his power went, that the national honour should be safe’, but ‘if any of the timid and servile party told him that they were not in a condition to go to war, he would endeavour to bring the guilty men to trial’, for bringing ‘such a noble nation into such a fearful and degrading state as that.’ Attwood wished to ‘place the country once more in such a condition that she might break the head of any despot in Europe who might insult her.’[[115]](#footnote-115)

Newspapers were constantly on the lookout for any statesmen they believed had been too soft on the national honour, as the *London Evening Standard* singled out Lord Brougham in 1839 for his moderate stance on the American-Canadian boundary question, which our Patreon series examines in more detail. Here, the *Standard* believed that ‘It is the characteristic of that school of reasoners to which his lordship belongs, to class the feeling of national honour amongst those prejudices which ought to have lost their influence’, criticising Brougham for his ‘materialism’. National honour, the *Standard* insisted, ‘was not a legitimate subject of discount’, and ‘does not come within the scope of Stock Exchange transactions.’ Because of this, the *Standard* charged that to Brougham, British honour was ‘at all times a superfluity, an extravagance — and a positive madness, when permitted to interfere with the smooth current of a traffic in cotton.’

Drawing on the examples set by British history, the *Standard* asserted that there would be ‘little difficulty in establishing’, that ‘the maintenance of a high standard in regard to the feeling of national honour can never be “unprofitable."’ This was because ‘A true appreciation of what is due to national honour will prevent a country like England from offering outrage to other nations, or from submitting to outrage at their hands.’ Insults were not merely damaging to national honour, but were also ‘the "precursor" of injuries of a more weighty description’, and to repel insult was thus a matter of security. Further to this theme, the *Standard* opined that ‘We shall escape not one tittle of the danger that threatens us by shrinking from it,’ since ‘If we are not able to assert the rights of England on the soil of North America, we shall soon be found unequal to the assertion of our liberties on the soil of England herself.’ It demanded huge fleets and armies to defend national honour, lest it be believed that ‘within twenty-four years after the battle of Waterloo’, Britain had left it in ‘grave doubt’ whether she could ‘support a body of soldiers and sailors sufficient for the protection of her honour throughout her colonies and along her coasts!’[[116]](#footnote-116)

The conservatively-minded *Standard* was not alone in seeing insults as the beginning of greater threats to British security. The issue crossed political lines both in Parliament and in the press. So, where some might counsel negotiation in the event of an insult received, liberally-inclined newspaper *The Era* lambasted this philosophy: ‘NEGOTIATION!! – Does a man of honour negotiate when a direct insult, a clear injury is done him? – No; but he demands reparation.’ It asked how ‘an independent nation [could] negotiate where her honour is concerned’, or could she ‘consistently with her dignity, beg, entreat, and expostulate that she may not be lowered in the eyes of all, from submission to manifest wrongs?’ No, *The Era* proclaimed, because ‘For her injured honour instant reparation should have been sought – to ascertain the amount of the pecuniary claim of the merchant, negotiation was admissible.’ It then concluded with the familiar warning that ‘the evil does not rest there’, because ‘the consequences of this continual abandonment of our rights, and sacrifice of the national honour by the constituted authorities of the realm, must eventually prove fatal to the monarchy.’[[117]](#footnote-117)

Lest it be implied that national honour was a solely British concern, in an 1840 Commons debate on policy towards France, where Britain had concluded a cross-European treaty on the Ottoman Empire without French input, the government were criticised by radical reformer John Leader for leaving the French to believe ‘that their honour had been insulted, and that in these proceedings the noble Lord [Palmerston] had sacrificed them to the other great powers of Europe.’ Leader warned that ‘If this feeling was allowed to continue it must lead to the very worst consequences.’ The French took offence at their exclusion, and although Leader conceded that ‘He might be told that this was a mere matter of form in the negotiations’, unfortunately ‘the French were very nice and touchy on points of honour in matters of this kind, and certainly they could not be blamed for having a nice sense of honour’, particularly when Britain was so sensitive of its own.[[118]](#footnote-118)

Minor regional newspapers could occasionally provide the most concise account of honour and its inherent script, as in 1844 rural Scotland’s *Northern Warder and General Advertiser* warned of ‘a considerable class of politicians, whose admiration of peace is so intense; that they are willing to pay any price for it.’ ‘National honour’ these statesmen viewed as ‘a mere abstraction, which may at any time be abandoned to be trampled upon’, while ‘To speak of war as necessary and allowable to maintain it inviolate, is but to elicit their mockery.’ If the government took ‘a less superficial view of matters’, then ‘they might perhaps perceive that peace never so well maintained as when it is based upon a stern vindication of national honour’, and that ‘the country, which exhibits itself as careless of its honour, will not long enjoy either peace or independence.’

The *Northern Warder* cautioned that ‘To Great Britain it is above all other countries important that the sanctity of her flag be kept stainless’, because ‘British subjects and British property are spread over all the globe, and it is impossible that she can be present in every locality to protect them with ships and troops.’ Thus, Britain’s only option was to ‘commit their safety to the keeping of her flag’, but the flag could ‘only continue to afford them secure asylum, so long it is known that any insult offered to it, or any injury inflicted upon those having right to take shelter under its folds, will be promptly and certainly avenged.’ It linked the security of Britons with other interests, believing the British flag a ‘cheap and inexpensive safeguard’ of them. The *Northern Warder* did not deny that it was to be ‘deeply deplored, if at any time the vindication of it shall drive her to take up arms’, but even at such a high price ‘it must be maintained, if evils still greater and more terrible would be averted.’[[119]](#footnote-119)

Five years later, in 1849 Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston commented on the Russian invasion of rebellious Hungary, and emphasised that it was essential for British interests and trade that ‘it should be known and well understood by every nation on the face of the earth that we are not disposed to submit to wrong’, and that ‘the maintenance of peace on our part is subject to the indispensable condition that all countries shall respect our honour and our dignity, and shall not inflict any injury upon our interests.’[[120]](#footnote-120) Such reflections were not unique, but they do compliment the pattern of angst which accompanied any insult, or failures to vindicate that insult and acquire satisfaction. It was dishonourable, so it seemed, to value things like trade, money, or even peace above the national honour, since the belief went that all those things would be jeopardised by a failure to respond appropriately to insult.

You may be wondering what constituted an insult in British minds. The list was long, and included an attack on British subjects overseas; a belief that a rival had violated a treaty Britain was a party to; an insult given by foreign officials and – the most common incident – the spectacle of disrespect given to the British flag. When British honour was insulted, it was damaged, and had to be repaired. The only means of repair was to follow the honour script, and the logic of national honour dictated that once it was repaired, British statesmen could get on with their lives. Indeed, if satisfaction was acquired with sufficient speed and force, this could even rebound to their political benefit. Lord Palmerston was famous during his multiple stints as FS for reacting to perceived insults with such aggression and determination that it netted him enormous popularity among the public and press. Palmerston arguably used this popularity to acquire the office of PM for himself in 1855, since it was believed then that only he was possessed of that fiery passion for the national honour which would save Britain from the disasters of the CW, and restore her reputation as the premier power of the world.

However, this eagerness to defend the national honour – and this ability to see insults in the behaviour of states or all sizes – also made Palmerston many enemies, and made contemporaries nervous that he would launch Britain on a dangerous course of war over grievances which could be settled with minimum fuss or effort. A great example of this kind of debate playing out was in the Don Pacifico Affair of 1850. In this case, British citizen Don Pacifico was attacked by an anti-Semitic mob in Athens, his property was destroyed, his possessions were stolen, and his efforts to obtain redress for his losses from the Greek government failed. Here was an insult to a British subject, so what did Palmerston do? His critics would have argued that he had several options, but Palmerston chose the nuclear option, sending a fleet to blockade Greece until it provided the satisfaction Britain required. The incident drew French and Russian interest, who demanded Britain moderate its behaviour, but Palmerston persevered, safe in the knowledge that his fellow Britons would marvel at the spectacle of British ships demanding justice from any powers, regardless of their size, or who their protectors might be.

But the prospect of Britain coercing the weaker Greek power with its unparalleled navy provided the platform to express and debate other concepts, such as the shame which came from attacking the weak, or the dishonour which was incurred from a policy of meddling interference. This opposition position was encapsulated on 17 June 1850 in Lord Stanley’s successful Motion in the House of Lords. Lord Stanley would later serve multiple times as PM Lord Derby, but here he was laser focused on calling Palmerston to account, and he proclaimed that the Lords ‘would rather have been engaged in deadly conflict with the fiercest enemy this country ever encountered’ than to have seen ‘the honour of the British flag thus prostituted by attacking a weak, unoffending people’, or ‘plundering wretched, half-pauper fishermen of their sole means of subsistence.’ Noting the British blockade of Greek shores, veteran diplomat Sir Stratford Canning maintained that it was ‘easy to trump up claims against a weak neighbour; it is easy to ask for redress in terms which make compliance impossible’, and then follow with ‘threats, reprisals, hostilities.’[[121]](#footnote-121)

In response to this censure in the Lords, the radical and occasional ally of Palmerston John Roebuck tabled a Motion in the Commons which would force Members to discuss whether Palmerston’s foreign policy principles ‘have been such as were calculated to maintain the honour and dignity of this country’, and ‘preserve peace between England and the various nations of the world.’[[122]](#footnote-122) Speaking on the second day of the debate, Palmerston could declare that this Motion did not concern ‘merely the tenure of office by one individual, or even by a Government’, but was instead a question which involved ‘principles of national policy, and the deepest interests as well as the honour and dignity of England.’ Palmerston criticised the Lords, which had defeated the government by laying down ‘a principle of national policy, which I consider totally incompatible with the interests, with the rights, with the honour and with the dignity of the country.’ Establishing this contrast, Palmerston objected to the idea that ‘British subjects…must trust to that indifferent justice which they may happen to receive at the hands of the Government and tribunals of the country in which they may be.’ British subjects should apply to local authorities for redress where possible, but when these authorities failed them – as they failed Don Pacifico – Britain was obliged to defend those subjects by acquiring redress in their name.

For those that asked ‘why should we trouble our heads about so small a matter?’, Palmerston clarified that ‘What we asked was an apology’, and declared that he ‘really did not expect to live to see the day’ when Englishmen could think that seeking an apology was of doubtful use. Palmerston also used the opportunity to remind members of Greece’s history of failing to grant Britain satisfaction in a series of minor grievances, including one where Greek officials imprisoned Royal Navy officers when they made landfall. Now, Palmerston believed, it was time to collect on this pattern of insult, and the FS asserted that ‘Surely no defence is necessary for having demanded an apology for an insult offered to the British Navy.’ So it was for Don Pacifico, who ‘wanted redress, not revenge’, and Britain was justified ‘in calling on the Greek government for compensation for the losses’ he had suffered, particularly when the Greeks ‘denied altogether the principle of the claim.’ Palmerston reminded Members that the Russians had acknowledged the justice of British claims years before; he repelled the idea that his policy was ‘meddlesome’, and delivered the famed conclusion to his speech, challenging his audience to determine whether ‘as the Roman, in days of old, held himself free from indignity, when he could say Civis Romanus sum’, so also ‘a British subject, in whatever land he may be, shall feel confident’ that Britain’s ‘watchful eye’ and ‘strong arm’ would ‘protect him against injustice and wrong.’

This manifesto was nothing new; when Captain Elliot had been imprisoned by the Chinese in Canton in 1839, it had kickstarted the Opium War. When Alexander McLeod was arrested in New York in 1840, we saw in the Patreon series how Palmerston instigated a new period of crisis in AA relations, and levelled threats against Washington until he was eventually released. Yet the strength of Palmerston’s speech in 1850 was its proud, defiant tone, and for Members to vote against these principles now would be akin to a repudiation of the foreign policy which had come before. Some did attempt to contest Palmerston’s association of the national honour with the insulted subject, but as Palmerston recognised, such a principle was popular, and ‘held by the great mass of the people of this country’.[[123]](#footnote-123) This popularity stemmed from Palmerston’s willingness to wrest satisfaction from Britain’s rivals, when an insult was delivered to the British flag, a flag which represented the national honour. Palmerston’s renown for seeking satisfaction whatever the circumstances would be tested in 1861, when confrontation with the Union on the high seas led to the latest controversy with the US, in the Trent Affair.

On 8 November 1861, officers of the USS *San Jacinto* boarded the *Trent*, a British mail steamer, and seized John Slidell and James Mason, the two Confederate commissioners on board. Within an hour, the commissioners were transferred to the *San Jacinto*, and the *Trent* continued on its way.[[124]](#footnote-124) Captain Wilkes – the American responsible for orchestrating this act – may have believed that the usual protocols and customs had been adhered to, but in fact, he had just created the greatest Anglo-American crisis since the War of 1812.[[125]](#footnote-125) Wilkes had violated international law and compromised the protections foreign dignitaries enjoyed while under the neutral British flag. Thus, Laurence Fenton asserted that ‘The closest Britain came to intervening in the [American Civil] war was during the winter of 1861- 62.’[[126]](#footnote-126) The *Times* clarified the matter: ‘People ask, “What does England care about Slidell and Mason?” and are astonished to be told in reply that she cares something about the law of nations and her national honour.’[[127]](#footnote-127)

Palmerston was not alone in seeing the need for satisfaction when the national honour had been insulted. Seymour Fitzgerald, who served as undersecretary for foreign affairs and was an adept colonial administrator, observed that in private life, the individual most worthy of respect was ‘…the man who, determined to take no liberties with others, is equally determined that no liberties shall be taken with him. And what is true in private life is true in politics…’[[128]](#footnote-128) Speaking in the context of the Trent Affair, the now former PM and leader of the opposition Lord Derby presented the case succinctly in the House of Lords. ‘I believe that the maxims which regulate private society are not inapplicable among nations,’ Derby said, continuing:

…and speaking to an assembly of high-minded men, I am certain that there is not one of your Lordships who, if it were made clear to him that you had offended or injured any person with whom you had been on intimate relations, would not feel that the most honourable course was to anticipate any possible requirement from the other side, and to tender on the instant a frank and manly apology; and the more ample, the more, speedy, and the more frank was the apology the higher would he who made it stand in the estimation of all honourable men.[[129]](#footnote-129)

So how should Britain respond when it was established that the Americans were in the wrong, but refused to apologise to Britain for the act? In Lord Derby’s view, from the moment these two faces were established…

…that moment the country, equally as one man, determined that reparation and apology must be obtained. They adopted that determination not in passion, not in anger, not in fierce excitement, not rejoicing in the prospect of war—at which, indeed, they shuddered with abhorrence—but as in the performance of a grave, serious, imperative duty—a painful duty, but one from which, however painful, they could not shrink, because, great as might be the horrors of war, greater still would be the ignominy of forfeiting the national honour.[[130]](#footnote-130)

In late November 1861, when the incident was first learned of, the *Morning Herald* delivered both a demand and a warning to its readership. ‘We trust,’ the *Morning Herald* declared, ‘that there will be no delay in avenging an outrage unprecedented, even in the annals of American lawlessness.’ But what of those Britons that might hesitate rather than insist on such a firm course? The *Herald* stated its position more explicitly: ‘Opposition to the vindication of the national honour will only consign to utter political insignificance the politician who ventures to attempt it…’ There was no question of what should be done, as the *Herald* elaborated:

It is the duty of our government to demand the immediate return of the gentlemen stolen from under our flag, together with an ample apology for a lawless act of piratical aggression; and to prepare for the rejection of such a demand by dispatching forthwith to the American coast such a naval force as may ensure the total destruction of the Federal navy, and the instant blockade of all the chief Northern ports, if due satisfaction be not given without delay.[[131]](#footnote-131)

Only by showing the Americans they were in earnest would Washington take British demands seriously. This stance was rooted in the clear injustice of the American act, as *The Times* explained, ‘the act of the Captain of the *San Jacinto*,’ was ‘a clear violation of the law of nations, and one for which reparation must be at once demanded.’[[132]](#footnote-132) Rousing such emotions could make any form of compromise – such as arbitration – increasingly difficult. By the middle of December 1861, indeed, American newspapers and statesmen were made aware of the uniformly hostile reaction in the British public sphere.[[133]](#footnote-133) Some, such as renowned American author and friend of Bismarck, Jonathan Lothrop Motley, reacted with palpable shock and offence: ‘I believed their statesmen governed by a high sense of honor and justice, and almost alone among Americans, I have been defending them every day. I never could have suspected them of such perfidy and brutality.’[[134]](#footnote-134) But Motley’s peers were not in agreement; others, such as Henry Adams, son of the Ambassador to London, lambasted Washington for its carelessness and provocation:

What a bloody set of fools they are! How in the name of all that’s conceivable could you suppose that England would sit quiet under such an insult? We should have jumped out of our boots at such a one.[[135]](#footnote-135)

The offence was too great, and the damage to national honour too severe, for arbitration to proceed. In her thesis examining arbitration and national honour, Hilda Walters commented that ‘National honour is a vague but common term which has not been adequately defined except in so far as states have, in various circumstances, declared that the honour of the nation was involved.’[[136]](#footnote-136) With emotions running high, and national honour at stake, arbitration was virtually impossible, and in reference to the *Trent*, Walters wrote:

While the act itself was of no particular consequence, it was a direct insult to the British flag and thus to British honour, restitution for which could only be made by disavowal and an apology, which were eventually offered. Arbitration was not suggested by either party; it is possible that it would not have been suggested even if the United States had refused to disavow the insult.[[137]](#footnote-137)

National honour compelled the British government to make war preparations, but a war for national honour would also place Britain on the same side as the Confederacy. The *Spectator* noted that the southern commissioners which the Union navy had seized from Britain ‘…were not combatants, had no official position which the Federal Government had ever recognised, and, if claimed as rebels, could not be given up without the violation of a great principle and the loss of national honour.’ Yet, significantly, the prospect of conflict with the Union did not make the Confederacy more sympathetic. ‘We need not say with what keen regret we feel driven to this conclusion, for it involves steps tending directly to aid the worst cause Englishmen were ever asked to support…’ Just as Wilkes’ act was a humiliation, ‘That we in such a contest should be on the side of the wrong, is a bitter humiliation, but our duty is none the less clear.’ The *Spectator* lamented that ‘Almost any other insult might have been borne for the sake of the cause at stake,’ but notwithstanding the fact that the punishment of the Union ‘will involve the triumph of evil men,’ Britain had to proceed. After all, concluded the *Spectator*…

…there is something at stake as sacred as the national honour, and that is our right to receive all men not accused of civil crime, and it can be satisfied only by the release of the commissioners, with whom in themselves we sympathise much as we would with brigands.[[138]](#footnote-138)

This lack of choice when it came to the national honour was a common theme in early December. ‘The great question is, War or Peace?’ the *Banner of Ulster* claimed. ‘Silence and submission under such an insult are impossible; there is a cry for redress, if not for vengeance, that must be satisfied.’[[139]](#footnote-139) The crisis resonated with some surprising figures. On 6 December, William Smith O’Brien – once sentenced to be hung, drawn, and quartered for his role in the 1848 Irish rebellion – wrote what amounted to an open letter to the American Secretary of State, which was printed in the *Morning Chronicle*:

Unless England consent to forego all claims to manhood or national honour, she must resent this seizure; and, if the South be disposed to accept her cooperation, the successors of Washington must be prepared to encounter hazards more dangerous than have ever menaced the Western Republic.[[140]](#footnote-140)

Timidity or hesitation by Britain at this moment would forfeit the national honour. Any display of weakness would not merely be a shameful spectacle, it could also invite opportunists to take advantage of the perceived weakness. This was the functional element of the code of honour which contemporaries alluded to in their description of Britain’s options. ‘Is a war about to take place between England and the United States?’ pondered Dorset’s *Christchurch Times*. It noted that ‘In fact, almost everybody says so. There is no help for it.’ Either ‘the Americans must make full reparations for the insult to the British flag, or the insult must be properly avenged.’ Yet, a limited appeal was also made for peace, wherein it was asked:

Should not everything be done, consistently with the national honour, to prevent England from going to war for the sake of two foreigners for whom we care nothing, and one of them is noted chiefly for his former cruelty against this country? But our flag has been insulted, it is said, and we must have satisfaction.[[141]](#footnote-141)

Alongside these careful considerations of the case, there were bound to be outbursts of intense feeling among the British population. Yet, as the *Saturday Review* observed, such passionate and vocal individuals were essential to a nation’s well-being:

The calmest of men must have felt their breast throb with pride when they noticed during the last ten days how every rank, every class, every party in the country has been touched to the quick by the bare notion of an insult to the English flag. We should cease to be a fighting, and therefore a powerful and a great people, if we were too phlegmatic to have these quick impulses of indignation.[[142]](#footnote-142)

Debates among the British public through December and January suggested that the prospect of war with the US was held to be less inherently damaging than the consequences of national dishonour. War alongside the Confederacy would be unpalatable, but it was preferable to the shame which would follow a tame submission to the Union’s insult. There was no choice – especially when the insult had been inflicted in Britain’s preserve: at sea. Not only was war necessary in the event satisfaction was denied, but this war would plainly be the fault of Lincoln’s administration for playing fast and loose with British honour. As the *Leicester Journal* asserted:

England desires war with no country – especially with America – but our character as a nation is at stake, and tremendous as the consequences of a rupture with the Federal Government might be, satisfaction we must have. This, no doubt, on calm reflection, the Cabinet of President Lincoln will perceive the necessity of doing. If they refuse, let the blood be on their own heads.[[143]](#footnote-143)

Thus, when Seymour Fitzgerald presided over a gathering of farmers and gentry in his constituency of Horsham, West Sussex on 12 December, Britain’s choice was made explicit. War, in Fitzgerald’s view, was a national calamity, all the more so because it would mean war with America. Yet, Fitzgerald was quick to note that this sense of calamity ‘…does not arise from any fear of war. Thank God!’ Fitzgerald then made a noteworthy claim that

…I believe there is in this country a still higher feeling – a conviction that a war which is not necessary for the honour and for the interests of the country – a war instituted merely for ambition or for glory, is not only a political mistake, but is also a national crime…

The only circumstances in which war would be acceptable, Fitzgerald suggested, was in the event that the national honour was at stake. ‘We love peace,’ Fitzgerald asserted, ‘but there is something that we love even more, and that is the maintenance of the national honour.’[[144]](#footnote-144) This language was remarkably similar to that used by Earl Derby three years later, during the peak of the Schleswig-Holstein crisis, wherein the leader of the Conservative Party stated: ‘Dearly as I love peace, I love honour more…’’[[145]](#footnote-145) Similarly in 1861, Fitzgerald believed that the best way to ensure peace was to adhere to honour’s tenets: ‘…peace is not best assured by concessions that are not due concessions, and which are inconsistent with the honour and dignity of the country.’ Fitzgerald asserted that peace could be maintained, but ‘if that hope should be falsified then I feel there is that spirit in England that will ensure the full and ample vindication of our rights and honour.’

These sentiments received the loud approval of those present, suggesting a commonality of views. Sir Walter Barttelot, the Conservative MP for West Sussex and a Colonel in the army reserve spoke next at this gathering, insisting that ‘…if the Government had displayed a bold, determined front to the Emperor Nicholas as they had done in regard to the insult just offered to the national honour, the Crimean War would never have taken place…’ When an insult was received, this was also the only honourable course to pursue – there could be no other policy for a first-rate nation of Britain’s calibre, as Barttelot concluded:

It was impossible, with any regard to the honour and dignity of the country, that we could tamely submit to so gross an insult to our flag, and unless the Southern Commissioners were immediately restored, we must inevitably drift into war… If they confessed their fault England was strong enough to say “I am sorry you did it, but I heartily forgive you now you have acknowledged your error.”[[146]](#footnote-146)

Statesmen like Fitzgerald and Barttelot would prefer war to the dishonour wrought by a meek or hesitant policy. Yet it is also noteworthy that the Americans merely needed to confess their crimes and seek Britain’s forgiveness for satisfaction to be obtained. Britain’s ultimatum requesting such an apology had already been sent, but the length of time for Atlantic communications meant there would a lot of sitting and waiting, and in this period of reflection, the British press and statesmen maintained the pressure. Thus, on 11 December the Liberal MP for East Sussex Sir Henry Brand spoke in the town of Lewes, and told his audience “We hardly met a man who did not put the question, ‘Is there to be war with America?’ Well, who could answer such a question as that?” Brand was of the view that this question was America’s to answer, that England looked upon the civil war ‘as a great calamity,’ and then added that England…

…would look upon a war between England and America as a greater calamity [hear, hear]. But the greatest calamity of all would be national dishonour [great cheering]. That England could not submit to [cheers]. Peace was the greatest blessing on the earth, and we ought to make great sacrifices for it; but forbearance had its limits [loud cheers]. Peace, though a great blessing, may be bought too dear.[[147]](#footnote-147)

It is significant that the language changed very little even among members of different parties; this suggests a conformity of opinion, or at least a majority in favour of honour’s primacy in international relations. Plainly, these MPs feared the consequences of national dishonour, and believed those consequences worse than war with the Union. Speaking at the Guildford Agricultural Society, the MP for Guildford in Surrey, William Bovill, elaborated on what honour demanded from statesmen:

His own opinion was that a wrong had been committed, an outrage and an insult to the British flag [hear, hear] that we were bound, if it were intentional, to resent it, and the best way was to resent it immediately… If, however, the acts of Captain Wilkes were not repudiated, we were fortunately in a position to vindicate the honour of this country…

Having stated his position, Bovill then explained why no other policy could be pursued:

What would have been the consequences were we unprepared at this moment? We should have been obliged to submit to insult; and would that prevent the evils of war? If this outrage was intentional, the inevitable result would have been greater insults, until we were forced into war…[[148]](#footnote-148)

The uncompromising stance vis national honour was not an ideological quirk of the Victorian Era; nor was the rallying cry of ‘satisfaction or war’ issued merely because it seemed popular with the masses. A high national honour and a glittering prestige meant power and strength, just as a tarnished national honour and a diminished prestige suggested weakness.[[149]](#footnote-149) If Britain failed to wrest satisfaction from a rival for an insult, what was to stop Britain’s other rivals from taking notice, and taking advantage of Britain’s timidity? Maintaining the national honour was thus not a mere slogan, it was also intertwined with the national security. Conversely, a prosperous national honour and high prestige could be leveraged as influence, to apply pressure and secure further commitments from rivals.

By putting honour before peace, peace would thus be ensured. In reference to the above speeches, *The Times* could thus observe that ‘This is the language of men who are prepared to lose, if necessary, every son, every farthing, in the maintenance of our national honour…’ The war with America would come with fearsome consequences, but *The Times* assured its readers that: ‘All this is felt by those who are most concerned to feel it; and yet there is no flinching, but a steady confidence in statesmen who never yet flinched when the national honour was in question.’[[150]](#footnote-150) To flinch, to blink, or to hesitate when such a glaring insult was thrown into Britain’s face on the high seas would have plainly been impossible. However, the *Ipswich Journal* also noted that support for a war to vindicate the national honour did not mean Britons gleefully supported the opportunity to smash the Union:

We desire to inflict no disasters on the Americans. We ask simply to have reparation for an outrage; and if this is denied to us, we cease to be neutrals… Let it be known that where the honour of our flag is concerned, the Press of Great Britain no longer represents sections, but is the voice of the country.[[151]](#footnote-151)

With the people, the press and the politicians united behind this stern policy, it was little surprise that reinforcements for Canada were cheered by the citizens of Liverpool as they embarked.[[152]](#footnote-152) The *Morning Post*, a close ally of then Prime Minister Palmerston, was of the view that only two scenarios were possible: ‘We must either assume that President Lincoln means to make the necessary reparation for the outrage committed on board the *Trent*, or that he is satisfied that we will seek none.’ In the latter case, the *Post* was under no illusions, notwithstanding the popularity of peace:

Every party, and we believe every individual, in this country is anxious for peace with America. Nothing but a sense of absolute necessity will induce us to have recourse to war. But the Cabinet at Washington knows by this time that we are resolved, at all hazards, to maintain the national honour, and that, if ample reparation is refused, we are prepared to uphold our just rights by force of arms.[[153]](#footnote-153)

If Washington was aware of how seriously Britons took the national honour, then surely Lincoln would shrink from war, and provide Britain with the satisfaction she requested. This was a comforting assurance for Britons; surely, no government could possibly risk its security by entering war with the world’s foremost power while also fighting a civil war of its own? But what to do with those few who spoke against this pledge? The *Dublin Evening Mail* agonised over ‘a dozen or so of our fellow citizens, of respectable position,’ who sympathise with those that wished ‘to exhibit to the Americans, as though it really existed among us, a party which weighs the national honour as against pounds, shillings and pence…’ Significantly, the *Mail* assured its readership that no alternatives could be considered. Nor could a grisly description of the looming war deter the government from its current policy of seeking satisfaction:

It is no use beseeching us not to appeal to the sword, and representing to us all the horrors and miseries of war. We feel the dread nature of the alternative we present to Washington as much as any nation could, but those of us to whom the national honour is dear feel also that we cannot escape from it.[[154]](#footnote-154)

National honour’s inescapable nature did not blind British citizens to the horrors of war. War would be a matter of duty, because the consequences for ignoring such a slight and leaving it unanswered were believed more severe than such a war. The national honour was sacred, and this was a lesson which statesmen believed and echoed to their constituents. It was certainly the view of the Earl of Lincoln, Henry Pelham-Clinton, Liberal MP for Newark in Nottinghamshire, who spoke on Christmas Eve to his constituents in Nottingham’s Exchange Room. ‘Englishmen,’ the Earl of Lincoln declared, ‘have been taught to look upon national honour as essential to England – they have been taught to look upon the right of asylum as essential, not only to national honour, but as essential to the civilisation of the world.’ The Earl then presented his audience with a challenge:

…gentlemen, shall we now for the sake of peace, for the sake of our commercial interests – shall we allow that to be trampled on which we have ever held sacred and inviolate? No, gentlemen, the honour of the British flag must be vindicated! (Loud cheers).

In a familiar theme, the Earl insisted that while a fear of war would not stop the search for satisfaction, Britons had no love of war: ‘Let us hope that it may yet be done without war.’ But if it proved impossible to acquire satisfaction without such a weighted declaration, then the Earl of Lincoln was crystal clear about where he stood on the matter: ‘…let us show to the Americans and to the world that much as we value peace, we value national honour more (great cheering).’[[155]](#footnote-155)

It may be tempting to see national honour as an obsession of the British aristocracy. Were average Britons not more interested in their daily quest to feed their families? Yet, when reporting on a gathering of ‘working men’ in Birmingham, the *Daily News* underlined that national honour was not an aristocratic obsession, reserved for the elite, as was supposedly the case in France. Indeed, the national honour was the preserve of all patriots, and patriots could hail from any class:

The working-man had no sympathy with those who held the national honour cheap, and for his own part he had confidence in the capacity of the Government to “vindicate our honour.” This energetic language has the ring of the true metal. There is nothing of clap-trap or bravado in it, but just that happy mixture of firmness and moderation which befits a great people who have great interests at stake, but to whom honour is the dearest interest of all…

The national honour was a banner which all classes could rally behind, and these classes would never accept efforts to divide them or hide the true weight of the issue. This favour for national honour was not overzealous – there was ‘nothing of clap-trap or bravado in it’ – instead it was sensible, and reflective of the wide support which national honour rightly enjoyed:

The…Birmingham meeting represented very faithfully the feelings of the great majority of the British people; that is, of all the sober-minded, serious and responsible members of the community, who prefer honour at any cost to peace at any price… It is in this spirit that we earnestly condemn the policy of dividing English opinion on the previous question of national honour, or representing it as divided.[[156]](#footnote-156)

National honour was too important to brook divisions, and yet its central importance for the good of the British nation was apparently straightforward enough that all could understand it. This suggests that honour’s script was understood by more than just Britain’s governing class – or, at least, that the *Daily News* wished to suggest it was so. Certainly, British national honour mattered to those living outside of Britain’s Home Islands, as the Nova Scotian Premier Joseph Howe exclaimed, during a speech before the citizens of Bristol on 8 January:

While every man in British America wished for peace, and while there was not a man in the little province which he represented, and which might be taken as a sample of the other provinces, that would embark on an aggressive and rebellious war, there was not a man that would not rather that the province should sink beneath the sea than that the flag of England should be violated. (Cheers).[[157]](#footnote-157)

This could be considered a variation of the theme which favoured war to dishonour; here, Howe claimed to prefer utter ruin to dishonour. Howe would never have to make such a stark choice, but he would have to content himself with the limited American concessions. In the end, President Lincoln authorised the release of the Confederate commissioners, but he did not go as far as an apology for the seizure. In this context, the *Morning Post*’s editorial of 11 January serves as a remarkable interrogation of the national mood during the ‘now happily settled Trent Affair.’ Even if the Union’s response was not wholly satisfactory, Britons could be shown the wide-ranging effects which British success in the crisis had accrued:

Our finance will feel the benefits of the national self-respect and resolution. It will feel those benefits chiefly from the greater security given to commerce from the assurance, now rendered doubly sure, that the British flag cannot be unjustly assailed or contemptuously outraged. There is no species of English security, there is no kind of English investment, which has not had its value enhanced by the mingled prudence and firmness of Lord Palmerston’s Administration.

The impact of the victory would be felt further afield than just Britain; across the Empire, the news would underline Britain’s determination to stand up for its flag and for its principles. This message would resonate with even the most distant colonial peoples:

In India, in Australia, in New Zealand, the conviction will strike deep root that wherever the waves can bear, or the winds can waft, the flag of England, that her flag is a shelter and a shield to all who, without having violated the acknowledged rules of public law, shall venture to sail beneath it.

Of further importance was the message this victory would send to the Americans, who may have interpreted something of a decline in British fortunes and power in the previous years. After the *Trent* resolution though, it could no longer be doubted that Britain would stand and fight to oppose any and all insults to the flag. By so doing, British national honour was secured, and the Americans were left in no doubt as to British convictions:

The capitalists of New York have been made clearly to understand that there are interests which England prizes even more highly than the gains of her vast American commerce. The speakers in Congress have been made distinctly to perceive that there are dangers which England is more anxious to avert than a sudden aggression on her Canadian frontier.

The allusion to Canada led the *Post* to make the most remarkable declaration in this piece, when it claimed ‘The national honour is worth a hundred Canadas,’ and added that the benefits of the Trent Affair ‘as regards America’ were ‘far from being exclusively confined to the establishment of a better understanding with England.’ Indeed, concluding on the cross European support which Britain’s stance enjoyed, the *Post* relished the fact that Britain had not merely defended its national honour, it had also vindicated the principles inherent in international law, which all European nations could support.[[158]](#footnote-158) In this context, it can be little surprise that the national honour was considered to be worth ‘a hundred Canadas’ – nothing, indeed, was worth more than a policy which publicly and proudly defended the national honour from injury.

In the case of the Trent Affair, satisfaction took the form of an American apology and the return of the imprisoned Confederates. Yet, remarkably, both Lord Russell and Palmerston declared themselves satisfied with only one of these outcomes. Satisfaction was declared upon the release of Mason and Slidell; no Britons seriously advocated wresting an apology from the Union through war. Because of this, it is arguably possible to see Palmerston’s Administration as somewhat selective in its search for satisfaction. Yet, when one considers that Lord Russell was prepared to be ‘rather easy about the apology’, from an early stage, it is possible that the press, rather than the statesmen, may have set the bar of satisfaction too high from the beginning.[[159]](#footnote-159) In the end, these contradictions did not matter. The fruits appeared worth the struggle, as joyful crowds in the West End cheered the news of Britain’s triumph, and Palmerston’s political reputation reaped the rewards.[[160]](#footnote-160)

But what was it all for? Defending the national honour was the statesman’s duty, but could he expect any rewards for his success, other than a maintenance of the status quo and boost in domestic popularity? You might recall that I introduced F. H. Stewart’s theory of honour earlier in this episode, and that within that theory, Stewart conceived of honour’s three parts – the inner, outer, and claim-right. We have looked at inner and outer honour already, but what of the final aspect, the claim-right – or a right to be treated according to one’s position in the honour-group? How did this manifest itself in international relations, and can we see a version of this claim-right as a consequence of a successfully upheld or redeemed national honour? I would argue that it is possible to do so, but where gentlemen laid claim to respect based on their adherence to the code of honour, nations acquired something even more valuable. There was respect of course, from other nations that were mindful of your position, and treated you accordingly. There was also security, because your prestige as a nation preceded you. But there is another quality that nations strove after in return for their triumphs, and this was called influence.

During an 1837 Commons debate on his Spanish policy, Palmerston responded to the criticism of a peer who asked him the pertinent question: ‘What did the noble Lord mean when he talked of our influence with foreign countries?’ Palmerston then distinguished between different types of influence. One type was ‘the power of dismissing one minister of a foreign country by underhanded intrigues, and of substituting another by means equally discreditable’. On this type of influence, Palmerston was happy to note, ‘the present Government of this country exercised no such influence over foreign governments’, and this ‘was a species of influence, indeed, which he trusted no former government had exercised.’ However, if by influence, Palmerston’s opponent meant ‘respect for the English nation, readiness to redress any injury which might be complained of, continued acts of kindness,’ then ‘that was a species of influence which England had to the fullest extent with Spain’, and Palmerston assured the Commons that ‘our influence with Spain, was as great as any man could wish it to be.’[[161]](#footnote-161)

But influence came in many flavours. A decade later, Disraeli spoke of ‘the moral influence that we exercise in Europe’, adding that ‘this moral influence, although its exercise may be one of our most inestimable functions—although it should be of our possessions the most proud, is a possession held by a very delicate and refined tenure.’ Disraeli warned that ‘You cannot abuse it. You cannot increase its efficacy by Hudibrastic speeches and grotesque resolutions.’ Only by addressing foreign nations with dignity and armed with proper knowledge, could Britain ‘retain and exercise that moral influence of which you may well be proud; but when you do exercise it, let it be for the benefit of Europe, and the glory and reputation of your country.’[[162]](#footnote-162)

When Palmerston spoke of ‘the influence which a powerful nation must have upon a weaker one’ in an 1848 Commons debate, referring to Russia’s relationship with Ottoman Turkey, he presented a species of influence based on military power, reflecting that ‘our influence in Turkey must be founded on hope, and that Russian influence must be founded on fear.’ This was because ‘When we see two Powers of unequal strength in immediate contact with each other, the weaker Power must certainly be under apprehensions from the stronger Power’, and ‘the stronger Power must necessarily exercise a great influence over the councils of the weaker.’[[163]](#footnote-163) Whether influence was moral or military, contemporaries were informed enough of its importance to see the value both in preserving it and advocating for it. Critically, influence could be leveraged by British statesmen to arrive at a desirable outcome, but with a minimum of fuss and expense. Essentially, if British honour was in a sufficient state, British statesmen could say ‘jump’, and its rivals would say ‘how high?’ As influence was the outcome of upholding national honour and adhering to the honour-script, one could argue that influence fits into the ‘claim-right’ aspect of Stewart’s tripartite model of honour, alongside respect and security. What is more, we can see what would happen when statesmen perceived influence to have been lost, such as what occurred when Britain failed to intervene in the Schleswig-Holstein crisis of 1864, despite a previous commitment on Palmerston’s part to do so.

We want to know how far the honour of England has been pledged – how far it has been slurred by threats employed, or hopes held out which have not been followed by deeds – how far our principles have been compromised by promises of assistance, which have not been realised.[[164]](#footnote-164)

This plea was made by Lord Salisbury in February 1864, just as the Schleswig-Holstein crisis became more acute, and German soldiers crossed into Schleswig. This language illustrates the nature of obligations; much like an oath taken by a member of the elite, an obligation by a nation would have to be honourably discharged.[[165]](#footnote-165) The consequences for failing to fulfil pledges, as Salisbury understood, was a ‘slurred’ national honour. The Liberal Government would maintain throughout 1864 that it had never pledged itself to Denmark, and no obligations were upon Britain, save the humane concerns of preserving peace. But the Opposition could respond by quoting Prime Minister Palmerston himself, who had issued a warning to the Germans in July 1863:

We are convinced – I am convinced at least – that if any violent attempt were made to overthrow those rights and interfere with that independence, those who made the attempt would find in the result, that it would not be Denmark alone with which they would have to contend.[[166]](#footnote-166)

This turn of phrase would later be interpreted as an obligation on Britain to act in Denmark’s defence, should the Schleswig-Holstein dispute escalate into war, though this interpretation has been debated.[[167]](#footnote-167) Talk of obligation was an essential part of the discourse of honour during the crisis; just as a nation would commit itself to a Treaty, so too would a gentleman commit himself with an oath. Both actions contained striking parallels, and as the Tory journal *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* appreciated, adhering to one’s oath was a sacred matter:

The sacredness of oaths is essential to the existence of society: the man who is not to be believed on his oath is self-banished, self-disenfranchised, self-excluded from all the rights of society; for the obvious reason, that, if all men were equally false, society must dissolve.[[168]](#footnote-168)

To enter into an obligation was to pledge one’s word of honour, and just as society would dissolve without the due respect paid to oaths, a nation which failed to adhere to such commitments would cease to be taken seriously in international relations. The British press were eager to emphasise this formula; in the view of the *London Evening Standard*, now that Britain’s obligations had been ignored, the consequences were severe. ‘Isolated, distrusted, despised’, declared an editorial in February 1864, ‘we have taught the Powers to believe that they may treat us for the future with contumely; that our diplomacy is hollow bluster; that our public engagements are without force or import…’ Because Britain had ‘multiplied pledges and broken them’, the *Standard* lamented that ‘The pride of a gallant people is gone… The earth lies heavy upon the ashes of English honour, as it does upon the relics of Danish liberty.’[[169]](#footnote-169)

But national honour was also open to interpretation. One figure determinedly against intervention was Thomas Bailey Potter, MP for Rochester between 1865 and 1895. Potter was a member of the so-called Manchester School, which always advocated a policy of non-intervention. At a mid-February 1864 meeting in Manchester, where he was the main speaker, Potter opened the meeting with the resolution which upheld that ‘…neither the honour nor the interest of England is involved in the war between Denmark and Germany.’ Further, Potter declared his views on the relationship between the honour of the nation and the necessity of neutrality:

We all held dear the honour of our country—(hear); but that cry of the "honour of England" had been often and grossly abused. In many cases our national honour had been sacrificed when it ought to have been supported… In the present case the honour of England was not menaced; there was no clear case of justice in the dispute between Denmark and Germany… The honour of England was not, therefore, concerned in the dispute (hear).[[170]](#footnote-170)

The non-interventionist manifesto was here explicitly and consistently expressed, but critics of this stance were not difficult to find, even among liberally inclined observers. Thus, when Liberal-leaning paper *The Daily News* examined the same meeting,[[171]](#footnote-171) it declared that the resolution which ruled that ‘neither the honour nor the interest of England is involved in the war between Denmark and Germany’, was ‘a proposition to stagger an ordinary observer of events.’ And the *Daily News* continued with a critique on the views of honour which the non-interventionists upheld:

How do those who affirmed it know it to be true? What is national honour? Has it anything to do with national reputation, fair fame, the opinion entertained of us by the world at large? If so, we venture further to ask where the men can live and move and have their being who are capable of denying that our honour has been most deeply involved in this quarrel, and that it is not yet cleared? These utterances are sectional and un-English… It is one thing to say that our honour ought never to have been pledged to the Danish cause – which is probably all that the speakers meant – and another to affirm that it is not involved… We may save ourselves from the material consequences at the eleventh hour, by protesting against war when the case has been brought by regular steps to that pass, but we shall not save ourselves with honour.

Such a column does not only provide a second opinion on honour in the Schleswig-Holstein crisis, it also clearly identifies honour as a resource which can be pledged or withheld. The *Daily News* was not wholly against the principle of non-interventionism, but it did note that it was too late to withdraw from the equation now, as such a withdrawal should have been undertaken from the beginning, saying: ‘The only way of preserving peace with honour is to avoid entangling ourselves in affairs with which we have nothing to do.’[[172]](#footnote-172) There was also a danger that the demands of honour would imperil Britain’s material interests if she did intervene. This danger, indeed, had been highlighted in 1863 in the context of the Polish revolt by former ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe. Then, de Redcliffe had cautioned, Britain was being pulled in too many directions:

More than one English Ministry had been compelled to go to war to redeem, at whatever cost, pledges that had been previously given, because the honour of the country was supposed to be involved in the redemption of those pledges. This danger belonged to all guarantees, and he therefore regretted that the principle of guarantees was so greatly extended as scarcely to leave a part of Europe where we were not in danger of war in consequence.

 ‘We were exposed at any moment’, Redcliffe added, ‘to consequences of the most dangerous and hazardous kind, in which we might find our honour and our interest at variance.’[[173]](#footnote-173) Few contemporaries would have declared that it was within Britain’s interest to make war on Germany in defence of Denmark,[[174]](#footnote-174) but if honour seemed to demand it, what choice did Palmerston’s administration have? One could be forgiven for considering national honour merely as *national pride*, or as the British statesman’s desire to boast of his country’s success. Further, a sceptic might be tempted to view honour merely as window-dressing for foreign policymakers, and as a device which lacked true substance or any tangible importance. However, as the historian Rebecca Matzke has underlined, national honour ‘was crucial to the nation’s overall strategy of deterrence’ which should not be dismissed as ‘simply an emotional concept, nor was it a cultural tradition that demanded a response to every perceived insult (like a duel).’ National honour, indeed as Palmerston and his colleagues appreciated, ‘really meant credibility’, and Matzke concluded:

If Britain failed to act in a situation that challenged its interests, it might lose its ability to deter adversaries in the future, thereby increasing the costs and complications of protecting those interests. Politicians of all parties recognized this fact.[[175]](#footnote-175)

Such a presentation was validated by contemporary statesmen, such as Lord Salisbury, later serving as Prime Minister several times, who noted during the fractious Parliamentary debates of early July 1864 that:

Look at the difficulty of your situation now. You cannot by any form of words you can use persuade Foreign Powers that you are in earnest. In any future European complications that may arise, you may tell them that your interests are greatly concerned, that you are not indifferent to a question, that you view the matter in a very serious light, that the aggressors might be met by armed intervention; but until you have committed yourselves to irrevocable war, you will not be able to make those listen to whom you address yourselves. This loss of dignity and honour is not a sentiment; it is a loss of actual power. It is a loss of power which will have to be brought back at some future day by the blood and treasure of England.[[176]](#footnote-176)

The consequences of the Schleswig-Holstein crisis, in Salisbury’s mind, were abundantly clear. The Government had failed to maintain the national honour, and its prestige had declined. This decline in prestige meant a deterioration in influence, and if British influence suffered, then what followed was an inability to make British interests safe in the world without great expense. This was clearly understood in 1864; the link between security and honour was so explicit it was communicated in the Opposition’s Motion, which was presented by Benjamin Disraeli on 4 July. Disraeli believed that Viscount Palmerston’s administration had ‘lowered the just influence of this country in the counsels of Europe, and thereby diminished the securities for peace.’[[177]](#footnote-177) What did Disraeli mean by this? ‘I mean an influence that results from the conviction of foreign Powers that our resources are great and that our policy is moderate and steadfast’.[[178]](#footnote-178) Disraeli understood that the loss of such a resource was akin to disaster: ‘The consequences are – to use a familiar phrase in the despatches – “most serious," because in exact proportion as that influence is lowered the securities for peace are diminished.’[[179]](#footnote-179)

The point which Salisbury and Disraeli were making was that if a nation possessed high influence, this nation would have its warnings heeded, and once its desires were inexpensively communicated, they would be met by a concert of powers eager to please so prestigious and powerful a nation. National honour, in other words, created an aura of power, a prestige, which would have to be regularly protected and increased.[[180]](#footnote-180) In return for this, Britain would be able to enjoy unparalleled security across the world, yet without this aura, a ‘loss of actual power’ would follow, as Britain scrambled to meet new challengers and rivals, supress colonial revolt, and maintain friendly relations with its neighbours. The message that a dishonour would have to be recouped at great expense, but at a later date, was also common, and tied into the idea that national honour and security were intimately intertwined.[[181]](#footnote-181)

A few years later, and in the context of the 1867 invasion of Abyssinia, where British officials had been unlawfully imprisoned, an aggressive response was justified by Sir Henry Rawlinson on the basis that it was essential to preserve British prestige if Britain’s colonial subjects were to remain quiescent.[[182]](#footnote-182) Rawlinson would note that his opinion of prestige was not ‘derived from theory or from books’, and was instead ‘the result of personal experience and observation’, and Rawlinson then elaborated:

I would say, then, that I look on "prestige" in politics very much as I look on "credit" in finance. It is a power which enables us to achieve very great results with very small means at our immediate disposal. "Prestige" may not be of paramount importance in Europe, but in the East, Sir, our whole position depends on it. It is a perfect fallacy to suppose that we hold India by the sword. The foundation of our tenure, the talisman—so to speak—which enables 100,000 Englishmen to hold 150,000,000 of Natives in subjection, is the belief in our unassailable power, in our inexhaustible resources; and any circumstance therefore which impairs that belief, which leads the Nations of the East to mistrust our superiority and to regard us as more nearly on an equality with themselves, inflicts a grievous shock on our political position.[[183]](#footnote-183)

Nor was Rawlinson bluffing – as a well-travelled East India Company official and researcher in Persian cultures, he was qualified to comment on the importance of British prestige to its Eastern and Asian holdings.[[184]](#footnote-184) Rawlinson in fact communicated an ideal way of considering the national honour and prestige – as a resource which enabled Britain to achieve great results ‘with very small means’. It also helps to explain how Britain maintained its position in India with a relatively small army.[[185]](#footnote-185) Thus, the true value of the national honour is plainly expressed – it was the ideal situation for British policymakers, because it reduced expenses, guaranteed profits, and guarded against vulnerabilities in the event of a new crisis. National honour was therefore priceless, and the Abyssinian Expedition was justified on this singular incentive. A contemporary MP could note that the expedition would ‘look for no increase of territory, nor to obtain any special advantage on the coast of Abyssinia.’ There was, indeed, something inherently more valuable to him and his peers than these imperial or material gains, ‘and that is our national honour.’[[186]](#footnote-186)

However, just as a sufficient prestige was necessary to keep colonial subjects overawed, any cracks which appeared in this aura could spell disaster when dealing with more powerful nations in the West. Back to the Schleswig-Holstein crisis, and peaking on 8 July 1864, former Undersecretary for the Colonies, the Earl of Carnarvon insisted that ‘peace, if it is to be had, ought not to be bought by national humiliation’, and yet Carnarvon perceived that the Government, ‘so far from giving us peace’, had brought Britain to the verge of European war. One should not purchase peace with humiliation, as Carnarvon claimed the Government had done:

…and in this respect the case of individuals and nations is very similar; for the individual or the nation which once suffers the chastity of its honour to be soiled will soon find, to its bitter mortification, that there is but a short step from insult to injury and from injury to open aggression.[[187]](#footnote-187)

Here was the importance of honour to security plainly expressed; sacrificing the former would demonstrate the weakness of Britain’s position, and encourage rivals to take advantage. Russell’s foreign policy, Carnarvon maintained, was one which ‘reserves the thunders of British hostility’ for weaker powers such as China, Brazil, and Japan, and which meekly withdraws from contests with major European powers.[[188]](#footnote-188) Russell had to answer these charges, and he began by distinguishing between an inevitable war, and a war which should be debated. ‘I have said more than once’, the Foreign Secretary noted, ‘that if the honour of the country is involved, you can have no hesitation, no weighing of the inconveniences and disadvantages of war; but you must at once make the choice which is alone consistent with honour.’[[189]](#footnote-189) But the Schleswig-Holstein would be resolved without Britain’s input, as Britain failed to counterbalance Bismarck’s Danish coup, and her threats and good offices for peace were ignored with equal disinterest. Did this signal the beginning of a terrible new trend, where British honour was left tarnished by unfulfilled obligations, and a decline would begin? It was not difficult to find several newspapers and contemporaries who believed this was the case.

‘Good God!’ exclaimed *The Morning Herald*, ‘Has it come to this, that an English ministry can unblushingly avow that England is powerless to prevent a great wrong, is unable to vindicate her honour…’[[190]](#footnote-190) The *Sheffield Telegraph* proclaimed that ‘…neither nations nor men live by bread alone, but that the elements of all true life, national as well as individual, are the vital principles of truth and justice, honour and rectitude’, and it was then wondered…

…what if our finances and trade are being imperilled without obeying the dictates of honour towards Denmark? …is it not probable that we may soon find ourselves in that very predicament which, as a nation, we have forfeited our honour, lost our prestige, and submitted to hitherto unheard-of humiliation to avoid?

Having achieved peace ‘at the expense of national honour’ Britons were cautioned not to expect a peace which was satisfying or long lasting.[[191]](#footnote-191) Such an extract also reaffirms honour’s connection with security, since the dishonourable policy, even if it preserved peace, would surely lead to war in the long run. ‘It is true’ opined the *Birmingham Daily Gazette*,that ‘national honour may now force us into a war to save the remains of the gallant little State, but it will be a sad war – a war resulting mainly from ministerial stupidity.’[[192]](#footnote-192) The *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* assured its readers that travellers and statesmen alike attested to the fact ‘that the name of England has become a byword and a reproach… It is impossible for us to descend much lower in the estimation of other kingdoms.’ There was no mystery regarding who was to blame for this shameful state of affairs; Earl Russell, the *Gazette* claimed, had so mismanaged foreign affairs, that ‘every well-wisher’ must long for statesmen ‘who are actuated by the desire to maintain our national honour in conjunction with our national prosperity.’[[193]](#footnote-193)

Britain’s declining influence was another common theme which could be linked to this lexicon, as *The Sun* observed: ‘It has fallen to our lot to be cast in the evil days when national honour is overcast, and national influence is at a discount…’.[[194]](#footnote-194) Even regional Irish newspapers could present uncompromising opinions, with the *Tuam Herald* proclaiming that ‘Deep and lasting disgrace must fall upon England, for the part she has taken all through this affair.’ It was as good as fact, the *Tuam Herald* claimed, that the ‘incompetent’ Lord Russell had bungled Britain’s foreign policy, by delaying, rather than avoiding, war, and therefore ‘…it cannot be questioned that England has up to this obtained the postponement at the expense of national honour.’[[195]](#footnote-195) The *London Evening Standard* was in no doubt that the Government had managed to ‘disgrace and scandalise before the world the name of Great Britain’,[[196]](#footnote-196) and a few days later it offered that the Liberal Party ‘…pretend that the national honour is in their guardianship’, when in reality it had been sacrificed many times over. This moved the paper to ask ‘could there be worse or more perilous Foreign Secretary than Lord Russell?’[[197]](#footnote-197)

Protecting the national honour was of great importance, especially when twinned with concepts such as influence and security, or when measuring one’s obligations. Yet, when we consider the Schleswig-Holstein crisis of 1864, it must be noted that the Palmerston’s administration failed either to adhere to honour’s demands, or to protect its friends. As Keith Sandiford observed:

It was painfully obvious that the national honour had been sullied by a number of European slights which themselves bore ample testimony to Britain’s moral weakness in international politics at that stage. Her influence had waned to such an extent that she could no longer exert any applicable pressure upon the policies of any European state.[[198]](#footnote-198)

The code of honour was critically important to the conduct of Britain’s international relations – it was not merely a partisan’s weapon, to be wielded by the Opposition. Indeed, as the discourse of honour reveals, the Opposition were equally perplexed by the demands of honour. During the Schleswig-Holstein crisis no Tory Members actually advocated war with the Germans in Denmark’s name, granting Palmerston’s allies a convenient line of attack. In these circumstances, where neither party could propose a plan for recouping the national honour, British policy limped through various milestones in the crisis, before finally absolving itself of all responsibility for what had transpired. The best the Government could manage was the claim that peace had been preserved between Britain and Germany. Critics could ask at what cost this peace had been made, but it was abundantly clear that the Government was willing to pay. As a mournful editorial opined at the end of 1864, ‘It is not now necessary to review our Danish policy. A great Parliamentary debate, followed by a declaration of Parliamentary opinion, allowed the Germans to triumph. National honour has been tarnished, but peace has been preserved.’[[199]](#footnote-199)

National honour lurked in the background of Victorian Britain, occasionally rearing its head to justify a policy, or to embarrass the government. Its central tenets were not easy to adapt to circumstances. War and warlike measures were eye-wateringly expensive, and Britain was surrounded by rivals eager to make their own mark on the world, with impressive innovations in armaments and heavy military spending. The world had moved on from 1815, where it seemed Britain’s military and economic clout held Europe in rapture, and the world at her feet. Those that hankered after the glory days, where Britain would respond to any insult with unhesitating force, must have winced when they considered Britain’s limp performance in the Schleswig-Holstein crisis. However, 1864 was not the end of Britain’s mission to defend the national honour. This quest continued for another fifty years, and endured several more peaks and valleys before the Western Front killed the belief system dead.

But what can we conclude from all of this? To begin with, Frank Henderson Stewart’s theory of honour – we can safely say – generally does fit in with the Victorian presentation of national honour. Its inner, outer, and claim-right aspects were each identified within the British nation, where national honour was seen as an invaluable resource to be protected at all costs. Political divisions were cast aside in its name, and any sacrifice, even war, was said to be worth it for its protection. But war rarely followed insult, because contemporaries contented themselves with an apology, or some form of contrition, which they declared to be satisfaction.

Where satisfaction was impossible, fearful consequences were imagined. A damaged national honour, wounded by insults which were left unanswered, would teach Britain’s rivals that she was not to be feared, and that she could be undermined with impunity. Conversely, a glittering national honour empowered statesmen with a degree of influence and prestige, which could be leveraged against other powers to gain triumphs at minimal expense. At its base level, national honour was maintained by adhering to the obligations Britain had made, and defending allies even when this was difficult. British honour was generally in two stages; either it needed to be upheld by fulfilling obligations, or it was insulted, and needed to be avenged. Failure to do either would be ruinous both to British security and to the government which had presided over the disgrace.

Remarkably, the British people seem to have bought into this belief system, and were supposedly willing to sacrifice anything for the sake of British honour. Arguably, Britons did make the ultimate sacrifice for national honour in the end, but this did not happen until 1914, by which time national honour had somehow become even more ingrained in both the international system and in Britain’s conception of its position and its Empire. Adhering to the code of honour was not easy for the British nation, but amidst a spectacle of declining states, such as Austria and the Ottoman Empire, it was clear what would happen if Britain neglected this code. She would be cast out of the honour-group of great powers, unable to reap its rewards of influence and security, and her rivals would rub their hands in anticipation of an advantageous scramble for her colonies, trade networks, and resources. This nightmarish scenario never did come to pass, but there is certainly an argument to be made that this anxiety for the national honour made Britons more tenacious and aggressive when it came to conducting foreign policy. Perhaps, national honour even helped to increase the staying power of the Empire, by communicating to rivals that Britain would do whatever it took to maintain this Empire and its honour intact.

There is, of course, so much more we can say about national honour, but I wanted to give you this chonky episode because I felt it was time you got at least a taster of what I’m doing with it, and why I believe it is important. National honour really does deserve greater study, particularly in the context of European diplomacy, and perhaps this episode here will wet your appetite for even more discussions of that ethic and its structure. I have been on a journey with national honour ever since first exploring its role in WW1, and that was back in 2015 when I worked on my Masters. Since then, the world of national honour has revealed so much to me about the Victorian world, and yet I can’t help but feel like I’ve barely scratched the surface. But, in this scratching comes a sense of relief, and while you may simply be relieved that this episode is now over, I hope you enjoyed the experience as well. A final reminder that this script and all its references will be available in the Patreon post, but for now, my melted brain and I are going to take our leave. So thanks so much for listening history friends, my name is Zack, this has been a gigantic episode on national honour, and I’ll be seeing you all soon.

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2. J. E. Lendon, *Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001); Elizabeth S. Cohen, ‘Honor and Gender in the Streets of Early Modern Rome’, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Spring, 1992), pp. 597-625; Carlin A. Barton, ‘Savage Miracles: The Redemption of Lost Honor in Roman Society and the Sacrament of the Gladiator and the Martyr’, *Representations,* No. 45 (Winter, 1994), pp. 41-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Nigel Saul, *For Honour and Fame: Chivalry in England, 1066-1500* (London: Pimlico, 2011); [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Curtis Brown Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Michele Cohen, ‘“Manners” Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry, and the Construction of Masculinity,

1750–1830’, *Journal of British Studies*, April 2005, Vol. 44, No. 2 (April 2005), pp. 312-329. See also Jamison Kantor, *The Life of Honor: Individuality and the Communal Impulse In Romanticism* (University of Maryland: PhD Thesis, 2013), pp. 1-125. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Jamison Kantor, ‘“Say, What is Honor?”’, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (June 2016), pp. 1-36; pp. 2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Allen Z. Hertz. ‘Honour's Role in the International States' System’, *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy*, Vol. 31, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 113-156. See also James Bowman, ‘The Forgotten Honor of World War I’, *The New Atlantis*, Spring 2014, No. 42 (Spring 2014), pp. 25-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Brendan Kane commented that studies of honour in English ‘remained a rich field for research’; Kane, *The Politics and Culture of Honour in Britain and Ireland, 1541-1641* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Among those that have tried to define honour include the aforementioned Peristiany, who released a new volume with Julian Pitt-Rivers: *Honour and Grace in Anthropology* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also William Lad Sessions, *Honor For Us: A Philosophical Analysis, Interpretation and Defence* (London: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 2010); Robert L. Oprisko, *Honour: A Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2012); Alexander Welsh, *What is Honour? A Question of Moral Imperatives* (London: Yale University Press, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Frank Henderson Stewart, *Honor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. J. G. Peristiany, *Honour and Shame. The Values of the Mediterranean Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Richard Herr, ‘Reviewed Work(s): Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society by Jean G. Peristiany’, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Autumn, 1969), pp. 89-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See reviews by Asen Balikci, ‘Reviewed Work(s): Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society by J. G. Peristiany’, *Science*, New Series, Vol. 153, No. 3732 (Jul. 8, 1966), p. 164; Konstantin Symmons, ‘Reviewed Work(s): Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society by J. G. Peristiany’, *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Winter, 1968), pp. 129-130. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Franco Ferracuti, ‘Reviewed Work(s): Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society by J. G. Peristiany’, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 370, National Character in the Perspective of the Social Sciences (Mar., 1967), pp. 219-220. Emphasis my own. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Mervyn James, *English Politics and the Concept of Honour 1485-1642 – Past and Present Supplements III* (London: Past & Present, 1978). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See William Palmer, ‘Courtney Erin Thomas. If I Lose Mine Honour I Lose Myself: Honour among the Early Modern English Elite. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017’, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 2, (2018), pp. 390-392; p. 391. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Courtney Erin Thomas, *If I Lose Mine Honour, I Lose Myself: Honour among the Early Modern English Elite* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Among those that have tried to define honour include the aforementioned Peristiany, who released a new volume with Julian Pitt-Rivers: *Honour and Grace in Anthropology* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also William Lad Sessions, *Honor For Us: A Philosophical Analysis, Interpretation and Defence* (London: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 2010); Robert L. Oprisko, *Honour: A Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2012); Alexander Welsh, *What is Honour? A Question of Moral Imperatives* (London: Yale University Press, 2008); Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Honour Code:* *How Moral Revolutions Happen*;James Bowman, *Honour: A History*; Frank Henderson Stewart, *Honor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Kane, *The Politics and Culture of Honour in Britain and Ireland, 1541-1641* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The closest thing to such a survey is the useful study by Nigel Saul, *For Honour and Fame: Chivalry in England, 1066-1500* (London: Pimlico, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New York: Yale University Press, 2001); John Mayfield and Todd Hagstette eds, *The Field of Honor: Essays on Southern Character and American Identity* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2017); Robert Elder, ‘A Twice Sacred Circle: Women, Evangelicalism, and Honor in the Deep South, 1784–1860’, *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (AUGUST 2012), pp. 579-614; Allan Dafoe and Devin Caughey, ‘Honor and War: Southern US Presidents and the Effects of Concern for Reputation’, *World Politics*, Volume 68, Number 2 (April 2016), pp. 341-381. See also ‘Chapter 4: The Love of Fame and the Southern Gentleman’ in Sharon R. Krause, *Liberalism with Honour* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); ‘Chapter 3: “Honor Comes First”: The Congressional Debate over War’ in Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New York: Yale University Press, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Nancy Shields Kollman, *By Honour Bound: State and Society in Early Modern Russia* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999); Irina Reyfman, ‘The Emergence of the Duel in Russia: Corporal Punishment and the Honor Code’, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Jan., 1995), pp. 26-43; Paul Robinson, ‘Courts of Honour in the Late Imperial Russian Army’, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 84, No. 4 (Oct., 2006), pp. 708-728 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. William M. Reddy, *The Invisible Code: Honor and Sentiment in Postrevolutionary France, 1814-1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. A good general study is Faramerz Dabhoiwala, ‘The Construction of Honour, Reputation and Status in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 6 (1996), pp. 201-213. Thomas, *If I Lose Mine Honour I Lose Myself*, establishes a timeline of 1540-1640. Brendan Kane adopts a similar timeline for his study in Irish honour in *The Politics and Culture of Honour in Britain and Ireland, 1541-1641*. The following scholars all focus on the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries for their studies: Alexandra Shepard, ‘Manhood, Credit and Patriarchy in Early Modern England c. 1580-1640’, *Past & Present*, No. 167 (May, 2000), pp. 75-106; Richard Cust, ‘Honour and Politics in Early Stuart England: The Case of Beaumont v. Hastings’, *Past & Present*, No. 149 (Nov., 1995), pp. 57-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Notwithstanding the focus on the early modern period, one can locate some notable studies on British honour in the modern period. However, these studies tend to approach their subject matter through a specific lens, such as duelling and its persistence. See Donna T. Andrew, *Aristocratic Vice: The Attack on Duelling, Suicide, Adultery and Gambling in Eighteenth Century England* (New York: Yale University Press, 2014) and ‘The Code of Honour and Its Critics: The Opposition to Duelling in England, 1700-1850’, *Social History*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Oct., 1980), pp. 409-434. Stephen Banks, *A Polite Exchange of Bullets: The Duel and the English Gentleman, 1750-1850* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. There are some notable exceptions. The author made great use of the article by Allen Z. Hertz, ‘Honour's Role in the International States' System’, *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy*, Vol. 31, no. 2 (Winter 2002), pp. 113-156. A specific study was undertaken by Glenn Melancon in ‘Honour in Opium? The British Declaration of War on China, 1839-1840’, *The International History Review*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Dec., 1999), pp. 855-874. See also by the author *A Matter of Honour: Britain in the First World War* (New Jersey: Winged Hussar Publishing, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Julian Pitt-Rivers, ‘Honour and Social Status’, in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (J.G. Peristiany ed., London 1965), pp. 19-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Ibid*, pp. 10-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Walter P. Zenner, ‘Reviewed Work(s): Honor by Frank Henderson Stewart’, *Islamic Law and Society*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1999), pp. 119-122; p. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Julian Pitt-Rivers, ‘Honour and Social Status’, in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (J.G. Peristiany ed., London 1965), p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The debate between Pitt-Rivers and Stewart was traced effectively by Matthew T. Racine, ‘Service and Honor in Sixteenth-Century Portuguese North Africa: Yahya-u-Tacfuft and Portuguese Noble Culture’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Spring, 2001), pp. 67-90; pp. 69-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Stewart, *Honor*, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. This was done by Kane, *The Politics and Culture of Honour in Britain and Ireland*; Thomas, *If I Lose Mine Honour*; Welsh, *What is Honour?* See also Joseph Roisman (eds), ‘Honour in Alexander’s Campaign’ in *Brill’s Companion to Alexander the Great* (Boston: Brill, 2003), pp. 179-321. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Stewart, *Honor*, p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The historiography of female honour continues to expand. See Garthine Walker, ‘Expanding the Boundaries of Female Honour in Early Modern England’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 6 (1996), pp. 235-245; Gowing, ‘Women, Status and the Popular Culture of Dishonour’, pp. 225-234; Cynthia Herrup, ‘'To Pluck Bright Honour from the Pale-Faced Moon': Gender and Honour in the Castlehaven Story’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 6 (1996), pp. 137-159; Felicity Heal, ‘Reputation and Honour in Court and Country: Lady Elizabeth Russell and Sir Thomas Hoby’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 6 (1996), pp. 161-178. The most recent and valuable contribution is provided by Courtney Thomas, *If I Lose Mine Honour*, pp. 76-124. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Thomas, *If I Lose Mine Honour*, p. 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Stewart, *Honor*, p. 55, emphasis is my own. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Paul Friedrich, ‘Sanity and the Myth of Honor: The Problem of Achilles’, *Ethos*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Autumn, 1977), pp. 281-305; pp. 281-282. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Roisman (ed), *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great* (Brill: Boston, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. One’s sexual reputation could drastically affect one’s ability to acquire credit, which was critical for businessmen and women in a Britain before the establishment of a solid banking system. See John Smail, ‘Credit, Risk, and Honor in Eighteenth‐Century Commerce’, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (July 2005), pp. 439-456. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Roisman, *Ancient Greece from Homer to Alexander: The Evidence*, trans. J. C. Yardley (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 513-514. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. *Ibid*, p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Sarah B. Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 141 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Cited in Roisman, *Ancient Greece*, p. 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. More on Greek and Spartan discipline can be found in Paul Cartledge, ‘Hoplites and Heroes: Sparta's Contribution to the Technique of Ancient Warfare’, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 97 (1977), pp. 11-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. As a concept for historians, see John Tosh, ‘What Should Historians Do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain’, *History Workshop*, No. 38 (1994), pp. 179-202. Michael S. Reidy has provided a useful article on the extreme aspects of Victorian masculinity, see ‘Mountaineering, Masculinity, and the Male Body in Mid-Victorian Britain’, *Osiris* , Vol. 30, No. 1, Scientific Masculinities (January 2015), pp. 158-181. Masculinity and what it meant to be a ‘true’ man was a somewhat elusive question for Victorian men, as the principles which underpinned did change through the century, see Anne W. Windholz, ‘An Emigrant and a Gentleman: Imperial Masculinity, British Magazines, and the Colony That Got Away’, *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Summer, 1999 - Summer, 2000), pp. 631-658. The ideology surrounding masculinity invoked a range of expectations which were introduced to Victorian boys from an early age, see Claudia Nelson, ‘Sex and the Single Boy: Ideals of Manliness and Sexuality in Victorian Literature for Boys’, *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Summer, 1989), pp. 525-550. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. For an introduction to the theoretical importance of prestige see R. P. Dore, ‘The Prestige Factor in International Affairs’, *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), Vol. 51, No.2 (Apr., 1975), pp. 190-207. The debate on prestige’s usefulness in a general sense has been debate by three scholars in depth, see first: Paul K. Huth, ‘Reputations and deterrence: A theoretical and empirical Assessment’, *Security Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1997), pp. 72-99; Jonathan Mercer, ‘Reputation and rational deterrence theory’, *Security Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1997), pp. 100-113; Dale C. Copeland, ‘Do reputations matter?’, *Security Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1997), pp. 33-71. A useful contemporary view on the subject is provided by Harold Nicolson, *The Meaning of Prestige: The Rede Lecture Delivered Before the University of Cambridge on 23 April 1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937). By and large, theories on the importance of prestige have yet to be applied to the context of Victorian Era Britain. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. The theory of gentlemanly capitalism posited that imperial expansion was driven by the vested financial interests of economics and business, largely based in London. It was developed and articulated by Cain and Hopkins. See P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, ‘Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas I. The Old Colonial System, 1688-1850’, *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Nov., 1986), pp. 501-525; ‘Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas II: New Imperialism, 1850-1945’, *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Feb., 1987), pp. 1-26 [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. A good introduction to morality codes and ethics in the Victorian Era is provided by William A. Madden, ‘Victorian Morality: Ethics Not Mysterious’, *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Oct., 1961), pp. 458-471. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. See Lloyd Kramer, ‘Historical Narratives and the Meaning of Nationalism’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (Jul., 1997), pp. 525-545. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See John Darwin, *The Empire Project, The Rise and Fall of the British World-System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). See alsoJ. R. Ward, ‘The Industrial Revolution and British Imperialism, 1750-1850’, *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Feb., 1994), pp. 44-65; John Darwin, ‘Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion’, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 112, No. 447 (Jun., 1997), pp. 614-642; Norman Etherington, ‘Reconsidering Theories of Imperialism’, *History and Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Feb., 1982), pp. 1-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. See Angus Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture, Habits of Heart and Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Barber. *Theme of Honour’s Tongue*, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. The importance of personal credit and reputation for the gentleman is illustrated in the case study of eighteenth-century Edinburgh, provided by K. Tawny Paul, ‘Credit, reputation, and masculinity in British urban commerce: Edinburgh, c. 1710-70’, *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (FEBRUARY 2013), pp. 226-248. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. See Hertz, ‘Honour’s Role in the International States’ System’, pp. 126-128. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Daniel Markey, ‘Prestige and the origins of war: Returning to realism's roots’, *Security Studies*, Vol. 8: no. 4 (1999), pp. 126-172; p. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. This lexicon is established by several authors, including Faramerz Dabhoiwala, ‘The Construction of Honour, Reputation and Status in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England’, pp. 201-202; Thomas, *If I Lose Mine Honour I Lose Myself*, p. 10. Some have contested the primacy of honour in this equation, arguing that individuals were more motivated by the avoidance of shame than the pursuit of honour: see Unni Wikan, ‘Shame and Honour: A Contestable Pair’, *Man*, New Series, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Dec., 1984), pp. 635-652. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. What differs is the degree of violence, especially as the centuries progressed and honour became more about restraint than the duel. See Robert Shoemaker, ‘Male Honour and the Decline of Public Violence in Eighteenth-Century London’, *Social History*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (May, 2001), pp. 190-208. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Pitt-Rivers, ‘Honour and Social Status’, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. See David Quint, ‘Duelling and Civility in Sixteenth Century Italy’, *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, Vol. 7 (1997), pp. 231-278. Additional surveys can be found in For the Italian origins of the duel ethic and tradition see F. R. Bryson, *The Point of Honor In Sixteenth-Century Italy: An Aspect of the Life of the Gentleman* (New York, 1935); Bryson, *The Sixteenth-Century Italian Duel* (Chicago, 1938). These surveys challenge the oft-repeated but incorrect theory that duelling emerged from the practice of trial by combat. The trial may have imported the idea of violence into the noble ethic, but it was the Renaissance that provided the code of laws and values to the duelling practice. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. A recent study into the primacy of the duel has concluded on its surprising rarity. See Linda A. Pollock, ‘Honor, Gender, and Reconciliation in Elite Culture, 1570–1700’, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (January 2007), pp. 3-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Ute Frevert, ‘Honour, Gender, and Power: The Politics of Satisfaction in Pre-War Europe’, in *An Improbable War? The Outbreak of World War 1 and European Political Culture Before 1914* eds. Holger Afflerbach and David Stevenson (London: Berghan Books, 2012), p. 238. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Pacificus, ‘WAR COMPARED WITH DUELLING’, *The Advocate of Peace* (1837-1845), Vol. 2, No. 6 (JULY, 1838), pp. 38-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Ute Frevert, ‘Honour, Gender, and Power’, p. 238. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Limited research has been undertaken, but the event still requires further work. See Geoffrey Best, *Honour Among Men and Nations: Transformations of an Idea* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014); Norman Hampson, ‘The French Revolution and the Nationalisation of Honour’, in *War and Society: Historical Essays in Honour and Memory of J.R. Western* (M.R.D. Foot ed., London 1973); pp. 199-212. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Hertz, ‘‘Honour's Role in the International States' System’, pp. 122-126. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Bowman, *Honor, A History*, pp. 70-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. *Ibid*, p. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Best, *Honour Among Men and Nations*, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. *Ibid*, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Norman Hampson, ‘The French Revolution and the Nationalisation of Honour’, pp. 211-212. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. The beliefs of British statesmen on the eve of the First World War are examined by Douglas Newton, *Darkest Days: The Truth Behind Britain’s Rush to War in 1914* (London: Verso Books, 2014), pp. 145-261. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Best, *Honour Among Men and Nations*, p. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Bowman, *Honor, A History*, pp. 86-109. See also Peter Berger, ‘ON THE OBSOLESCENCE OF THE CONCEPT OF HONOUR’, *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie / Europäisches Archiv für Soziologie*, Vol. 11, No. 2, La foi et les moeurs or Faith and Morals (1970), pp. 339-347. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. See James Joll, *Nineteen-fourteen: The Unspoken Assumptions; an Inaugural Lecture* (London School of Economics and Political Science; Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Avner Offer, ‘Going to War in 1914: A Matter of Honor?’, *Politics & Society*, vol. 23, no. 2 (June 1995), pp. 213-241; p. 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. John A. Lynn, ‘Toward an Army of Honor: The Moral Evolution of the French Army, 1789-1815’, *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring, 1989), pp. 152-173; p. 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
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