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# Defining the Conservative Woman: Margaret Thatcher, Politics, and Gender

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# **Defining the Conservative Woman: Margaret Thatcher, Politics, and Gender**

An Honors Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of History  
Bates College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Arts  
by  
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Lewiston, Maine  
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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	ii
Table of Contents .....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 .....	9
The Election of 1979: Selling the First Female Candidate, Extreme Politics and All.....	9
Chapter 2 .....	27
Brixton: Thatcher’s Battle Against the Welfare State .....	27
Chapter 3 .....	43
The Falklands War: Thatcher’s Moment of Nostalgia and Empire.....	43
Chapter 4 .....	61
Urban Development Corporations: Thatcher’s Battle Against the Welfare State Continued.....	61
Conclusion .....	72
Bibliography .....	79

## Introduction

In 1974, the Conservative Party of Britain lost the general election for only the second time in twenty years, with Harold Wilson beating Edward Heath for Prime Minister. This election, however, was not a landslide victory for Labour. Not only did Labour fail to receive the 318 seats in parliament required for the majority, but they also did not win the popular vote.<sup>1</sup> If Labour had only just won the election in 1974, then by 1979 they were only barely hanging onto control. In the five years that Labour was in power, inflation rose a point where the government required an IMF loan to dampen the affects, the IRA increased violent action against the government, and the labor unions went on strike. Until the winter of 1978, the strongest defense that Labour had against the Conservatives was their relationship with the unions. The relationship became tense when the Labour government had to go against their social contract<sup>23</sup> with the unions and impose restrictions on pay rises. In retaliation for this limitation, the labor unions began to strike, and did not stop until February of the following year. The Labour government's inability to control these strikes in part helped the Conservative Party, with Margaret Thatcher at the helm, to win the general election in 1979.

Thatcher's climb to the top of the Conservative Party was no less tumultuous than Labour's drawn out dance with the unions. Thatcher grew up in the town of Grantham, a small, mostly middle class town. There, the two strongest influences on her life were her father and her environment. Her father held the position of town Alderman for the majority of her youth, thus

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<sup>1</sup> Labour had 301 seats, Conservative had 297, and Labour had 14.

<sup>2</sup> The Social Contract was set up between the Labour Party and the trade unions in exchange for repealing the 1971 Industrial Relations act, which had frozen wages and prices. The contract established that the unions and the government would work together to set fair wage rises and prices. Though this plan provided the basis for a good relationship between Labour and the Trade Union Congress, it failed to establish good controls for the economy as it did not allow for restrictions of inflation.

<sup>3</sup> "The Miners Strike and the Social Contract," The National Archives, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/miners-strike-social-contract.htm>

giving her a first hand look at politics from a young age. Thatcher looked up to her father, and even if she did not always agree with his politics, she agreed with the way that he supported their town and always attempted to do what was right. Despite her father's position as town leader, her family was lower-middle class, which frequently put a young Thatcher at odds with her wealthier classmates. She competed with her classmates at almost every given academic opportunity and gained a scholarship to the private upper school in her town. And though her grades frequently put her at the top of the class academically, her social skills made her a somewhat awkward addition to any social group.

Thatcher's need to succeed as a child shaped the competitive drive she exhibited later in her political life. After she graduated high school, Thatcher put herself through Oxford in the natural sciences program, gaining a degree in chemistry. While in school, Thatcher became the president of Oxford's Conservative Association, and following graduation she joined another local Conservative society. It was through this group that Thatcher's public political career began.<sup>4</sup> In 1950, Thatcher was chosen as the Conservative candidate for the safe Labour seat in Dartford. Following her second loss in Dartford in 1951, Thatcher took a break from politics to get married. After taking seven years off to become a qualified barrister and to raise her children, Thatcher began looking for a safe Conservative seat to run for in order to finally enter Parliament. She found one in Finchley in 1958, and thus became a Member of Parliament in the 1959 general election.

Thatcher's swift and unprecedented rise to Leader of the Opposition in 1976 and later to Prime Minister in 1979 brings to mind several questions about the intersection of politics and gender that this thesis will explore and seek to answer. The first question is whether or not it

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<sup>4</sup> It was also through this Conservative Society, the Dartford Conservative Association in Kent, that she met her future husband Denis.

mattered that Thatcher was a woman. In today's world, we are eager to focus on the accomplishments of women and to point out how far women have come on the road towards gender equality. And, yet, while gender equality is a necessary and noble aspiration for any female politician to add to their platform, it was not necessarily a part of Thatcher's. For Thatcher herself, her gender was almost a necessary evil. She was a woman who believed in the place of women in the home and the need to provide a good living for her husband and children, but she was also a woman with an unstoppable political vision. When Thatcher appeared in public, she would dress in a feminine way with a nice hat and matching handbag. However, her rigid, and sometimes extreme political opinions were the focus of her public appearances, rather than her put together appearance. Thatcher did not speak about women's issues or the fact that she was a woman unless it was pertinent to her party's politics. So how much did it matter in her rise to the top that she was, in fact, a woman?

Although none of those questions can be answered with a simple yes or no, this thesis will seek to answer this question through particular moments in Thatcher's time in office. Each of these moments, as I will discuss later, sheds light on a different aspect of Thatcher's personality and method of governing, and therefore can help us understand how exactly Thatcher was able to redefine Conservatism. As arguably the most right-wing Prime Minister in the last century, Thatcher drastically changed the face of the Conservative party. Between 1945 and 1979, the Conservative party had been at a bit of a standstill when it came to their political innovations. Shortly after the war, there was a consensus among the parties that the welfare system was a necessary addition British life, and thus it was established and supported by almost every Prime Minister regardless of party for the next 35 years.<sup>5</sup> Thatcher brought change to the

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<sup>5</sup> Necessary though it was, some Conservatives saw it as a necessary evil due to the welfare system's resemblance to Socialism.

party when she refused to take the welfare state in stride. Rather than going along with Labour's welfare initiatives, she sought to dismantle the system and return Britain to a state of self-sufficiency. This massive shift from the relative complacency of the last thirty years of Conservative leadership necessarily reshaped the Conservative party. In order to understand this new version of the party and subsequently the place that Margaret Thatcher created for women and Conservatives in British politics, one must ask three more questions: what did it mean to be a Conservative in Britain through the 1980s, what did it mean to be a woman in Britain in this period, and what did it mean to be a Conservative woman in Britain? It is only after answering these three questions that this thesis will be able to discern whether or not it mattered that Thatcher was a woman.

In order to answer these questions, I attempted to find sources written about Thatcher and her time in office. This endeavor proved to be more complicated than I expected. Since Thatcher was in office so recently, many of the primary sources that would be useful for this project, like news productions and government documents, are not yet available due to privacy and official secrecy laws that mandate a thirty-year wait period. As such, many of the sources that I have been able to find fall into two categories: primary source journal articles and books written about her election, and compilations of her speeches/biographies. This first category of sources has both its uses and its problems. The articles are useful because they show what political writers were thinking about the changing party dynamics in the moments that I am writing about. For instance, many articles write about the breakdown of the stereotypical class system and how that made party alignments harder to predict.<sup>6</sup> There were also several books in

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<sup>6</sup> One article in particular studied the working class and how their self-identification as working or middle class changed the way that they voted. The authors discovered that it was impossible to predict how the working class would vote because there were four separate voting blocs: those who identified as middle class and voted Conservative, those who identified as working class and voted Conservative, those who identified as middle class



the *General Election* series that compile data and tell the detailed story of each election, but as they are written so immediately after the election, they lack the ability to talk about the implications of the events that they are centered on. Thus, while I am able to use the material in these books and articles as background for my chapters, I am the only source available to provide the implications, which allows me the unique opportunity to break new ground on this topic. The uses of the second category of sources are similar: I am able to use Thatcher's speeches as primary sources, but I am lacking the content that would allow me to hear or see them spoken in her own words.

The most consistent source of material that I used in writing this thesis is the biography of Thatcher written by Charles Moore. Written in two parts, the biography spans Thatcher's life from before birth to her death, all in great detail. I chose this particular biography of Thatcher because it was the only one that she authorized. While Moore's book was an incredibly important source for this thesis, as it provided background information and some clues as to which speeches I should seek out in more detail, there are a couple of problems that arise when using this particular book as source material. As Moore says in his introduction, he was personally close with Thatcher and had a deep respect for her as a Prime Minister and as a biographical subject. The closeness of their relationship is both a good and bad thing for the reliability of the material inside the book. It is good because their closeness allowed him to know her character, and therefore be able to tell when she was exaggerating certain stories or painting them in a more flattering light. Their relationship became a detriment to the book when at times his fondness for her appeared to overtake his objectivity. In some places in the biography, the

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and voted Labour, and finally those who identified as working class and voted Labour. As the amount of people in each bloc shifts, so too does the amount of support that each party gets, thus making it hard to track the amount of support any one party may hope to receive from the working class. Mark Abrams, "Social Class and British Politics," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1961.

tone shifts from professional to almost overly sympathetic, thus creating an image of Thatcher that was perhaps overly awkward and socially inept, as if to exaggerate these qualities to make an excuse for whatever setbacks they may have caused in her life. Because of this, it is sometimes hard to deduce if her awkwardness was really the cause of some unfortunate moments in her life or rather just an excuse for her own inability to sometimes grasp the full picture of what was going on. I therefore used this source as a detailed timeline of the events in Thatcher's life, taking each of the personal details with some skepticism.

This thesis seeks to fill the gap in material surrounding the intersection of Thatcher's politics and her gender. It is possible that this gap exists because the majority of the material that would be necessary to study this intersection is not yet available, or because Thatcher's legacy is just now starting to solidify. I seek to study this particular area of her life because it is important to establish the place she left for women in politics, especially as more and more women are entering the field. In order to best answer the questions about the importance of Thatcher's gender and what it meant to be a Conservative woman, I have chosen three particular moments of her time in office that I believe most clearly exemplify the answers to those questions: her first election in 1979, the race riots and economic struggles of 1981, and the Falklands War of 1982. Following these three chapters I will provide a brief look at the years that followed the war as a way of continuing my arguments from the chapter on the race and welfare conflicts of 1981. In each of my chapters I will be discussing how her actions in those particular moments more clearly define what it meant to be a Conservative woman in her time. I have chosen these particular moments because they occurred while Thatcher still had to prove her worth to the country so that they would keep electing her, thus showing her at what she believed to be her absolute best. My fourth chapter will take a different look at Thatcher's actions, as it takes place

in a time where she had already established herself, therefore allowing her to effectively accomplish her Conservative agenda.

Each of the chapters sheds a different light on my primary questions. In the first chapter, I look particularly into what it meant to be a Conservative and a Conservative woman. By analyzing her first election, I am able to see which of her policies were particularly palatable to the public as a Conservative platform, and which were not. A direct comparison of the election strategies used by her opponent, Callaghan, and her advisors will show how she was forced to make different moves because of her gender, and how she worked to either downplay or highlight her gender depending on the campaign event and the audience being targeted. In the second chapter, I focus primarily on her gender and her politics separately. The strict gender roles that Thatcher adhered to may have affected her policies, but I will discuss how this may have been personal to her and not representative of being a Conservative in general. I will focus on Thatcher's attempts to fix the economy, welfare, and racial tensions in my second and fourth chapters. In these chapters I will discuss both the Conservative aspect of the race riots and how the politics of the time created the perfect combination of tension necessary to cause the riots and how Thatcher's personal politics may have exacerbated the problems. This topic is split into two chapters because the actual events were abruptly put on hold due to the outbreak of war. The war necessarily drew attention from the issues being discussed, so this thesis will follow the same path. The third chapter, therefore, will discuss the Falklands War, and how Thatcher's gender and Conservative beliefs about empire shaped the way that she handled the conflict. I will discuss how perceptions of her gender may have effected the way that she made her decisions in times when her gender may not have been relevant, as well as times when she used her gender to better convince people of her own politics. Together these chapters will show when her gender

mattered and when it did not, and the significance of each. In the conclusion of this thesis I will discuss Thatcher's legacy, and why the importance of her gender may have been added later on. By thoroughly examining these moments in Thatcher's life and the legacy that she left, this thesis will show how Thatcher used her gender, politics, and values to redefine a space for women in politics, and how she became the Iron Lady that we remember her as today.

## Chapter 1

### The Election of 1979: Selling the First Female Candidate, Extreme Politics and All

On May 2, 1979, the Conservative Party won the British general election with the biggest margin of victory since 1945 when Labour defeated Winston Churchill with a landslide margin of 198 seats. Despite this massive victory, when Margaret Thatcher drove to the Central Office for the Party in the early hours of the following day, she still refused to claim her victory. On May 4, Thatcher met with the Queen to be congratulated on her victory, but even still she refused to claim her victory. Thatcher did not claim her new title of Prime Minister until it was officially confirmed by Parliament.<sup>7</sup> Thatcher's determination not to claim an early victory is an indication of the gravity of her campaign. Everything in Thatcher's campaign was composed to be as serious and strong as possible. Not only did she have to overcome the political minefield that the Labor government had caused in their debacle with the unions, but she had to overcome the greater challenge of being the first woman to run for the position of Prime Minister. In attempting to overcome these challenges, Thatcher had to be extremely careful not to make any mistakes, as every mistake she made would have been not only attributed to the party that she was representing, but also to her gender as a whole.<sup>8</sup> Because she was the first woman to be in this position, everything she did set a standard for her gender, in spite of the fact that she herself did not always draw attention to her femininity. In this instance, then, gender did matter, for even if the public did not attribute any of her personal successes to the entire gender, they would do so with any of her mistakes.

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher, The Authorized Biography: From Grantham to the Falklands* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 435.

<sup>8</sup> This happened in part because people wrongfully assume that every woman would act the same in the position that she was in.

If this campaign were happening today, Thatcher's gender would be an issue constantly in the mind of the press, the public, and the candidates themselves. And at face value, it would appear that this was the case as well with Thatcher's election in 1979. However, it is unclear how much Thatcher's gender mattered in comparison with her politics. Rather than voting for a candidate like in American elections, people vote for parties on tickets in Britain, thus making it more challenging to understand if it was Thatcher the person or Thatcher's politics that won the election. Both clearly played a distinct role in the campaign, if not necessarily in the choices individuals made at the polls. In this chapter, I will be examining a selection of campaign moves from both the Labour and Conservative sides in order to tell which side of Thatcher's persona, be that her politics and her personality, had more of an impact. In doing so, I will also be moving closer to finding answers to the questions that were previously outlined in the introduction to this thesis: 1) What does it mean to be a Conservative? 2) What does it mean to be a woman? and 3) What does it mean to be a Conservative woman? Drawing on descriptions of the election written shortly after the fact and descriptions of ad campaigns and television appearances, this chapter ultimately argues that Thatcher was trained to be sensitive so that the new, more extreme Conservative politics she was promoting would sound more palatable, and allowed to be more somber and intense when she was addressing existing problems.

Much of the literature that exists on this election focuses more on the politics rather than the people involved. *The Great British Election of 1979*, part of the *Great British Election* series, tracked the election from beginning to end in the format of an incredibly detailed timeline. The book starts with a brief description of the previous administration, including how both Callaghan and Thatcher became leaders of their parties, and then continues with the actual election. The detailed nature of this book has been extremely helpful, especially because it contains transcripts

from television advertisements that I am unable to watch due to copyright restrictions.<sup>9</sup> *Britain at the Polls* by Howard Penniman, et al., a book very similar to *The Great British Election*, describes the election from the perspective of different voting blocs. Its chapter on women, while promising, falls into a description of stereotypical voting practices, saying that women either do not talk to their husbands about politics because it is inappropriate or vote the way their husbands want them to.<sup>10</sup> Along with these types of books, there is also a group of articles that assess the predictability of previously rigid voting groups, specifically the working class. Both the articles “British Parties in the Balance: A Time Series Analysis of Long-Term Trends in Labour and Conservative Support” by William Mishler, Marilyn Hoskin, and Roy Fitzgerald and “Social Class and British Politics” by Mark Abrams argue that the stratification of the working class into more income levels makes it harder to predict whether or not the stereotypically Labour voting group will continue to vote for Labour.<sup>11</sup> Though both these analyses are set in the 1960s, they are still relevant to this chapter because they show that both parties would have to work harder to gain the votes of previously decided working class.

As will be discussed later, the issues that the heart of this election were such that they required the Conservative party to take on alliances that would usually fall to Labour. Due to the conflict with the unions, Thatcher was required to make statements that could be perceived as supporting the unions in general while also condemning their striking. She was required to be somewhat sneaky and appear more sensitive to the unions problems in this instance due to the way

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<sup>9</sup> David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1979* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1980).

<sup>10</sup> Howard R. Penniman, ed, *Britain at the Polls, 1979: A Study of the General Election* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1981).

<sup>11</sup> William Mishler, Marilyn Hoskin and Roy Fitzgerald. “British Parties in the Balance: A Time-Series Analysis of Long-Term Trends in Labour and Conservative Support.” *British Journal of Political Science* 19, no. 2 (1989), 211-236. Abrams, Mark. “Social Class and British Politics.” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1961), 342-350.

the election was structured. Not only did the Conservatives have to sell their politics in this election, just like any other, they also had to navigate the added challenge of selling Thatcher herself. These two challenges were frequently intertwined, as Thatcher came with her own brand of extreme right leaning beliefs. In order to sell both Thatcher and her values, her strategists had to come up with a way to make both more palatable. They believed that the public would be intimidated by a tall, assuming woman telling them that they should be living their lives differently. Regardless of whether or not they were right, this belief guided the way that they marketed their candidate. Marketing Thatcher was even more challenging given that she was not known for her feminine sensitivity. In Parliament debates, she would frequently state her thoughts in a clear and concise manner, especially if they were made in disagreement.<sup>12</sup> In order to counteract this negative perception, Thatcher herself went on television several times and took part in activities that made her look more feminine and more relatable to the public. This was done with the hopes that if people believed that she as more relatable, her politics would appear more relatable as well.

This problem of relatability and sensitivity, however, was not one that the Conservatives could have predicted they would have in immediate aftermath of the 1974 election. When Labour won, neither Thatcher nor James Callaghan were the clear choices for the next leaders of their

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<sup>12</sup> For example, in July of 1962, Thatcher took part in a Parliamentary debate on increased rates of national assistance. When finally called upon to speak on the matter, the first thing she does is say how alarmed she is that more people have not stepped forward to speak on the issue, calling out particular departments as she speaks. She then proceeds to point out how previous speakers have misused statistics to distract the House from the actual issues. After she makes her opening statements, a Labour member tries to make her look incompetent her by asking why she chose to reference something that happened in 1946 rather than 1948. In response, Thatcher says that she does not have those particular figures with her, and then continues with her point. This particular example of conflict that Thatcher frequently encountered in Parliament shows that Thatcher was not only capable of strongly defending herself, but also well versed in making the men that tried to trip her look stupid for even trying. This particular capability of hers was problematic when it came to marketing her as a candidate to a population of men. As will be discussed later in this chapter, ensuring that the public's masculinity was not undermined by the campaign was a top priority.

House of Commons, Parliamentary Debate, Commons Sitting, vol. 662, July 13, 1962, [http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1962/jul/13/national-assistance-increased-rates#S5CV0662P0\\_19620713\\_HOC\\_86](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1962/jul/13/national-assistance-increased-rates#S5CV0662P0_19620713_HOC_86).



respective parties. In fact, neither of them were the leaders of their parties until mid-way through Labour's term. Though Callaghan was chosen second out of the two, his selection was less complicated and had fewer implications for the way the next campaign would have to be conducted. On March 16, 1976, Prime Minister Harold Wilson announced that he was going to be retiring from office, much to the surprise of the majority of his colleagues because he had just won the previous election and had not mentioned a retirement plan. What happened next was rather groundbreaking, though again not as significantly as what happened in the Conservative party: it was the first time that the Labour Party ever had the opportunity to choose a leader while they were in office. Between March 22 and April 5, the party elected James Callaghan to be the head of the party. The other significant candidates were Michael Foot, who was more moderate and had loyalty from Wilson's cabinet as Deputy Leader of the Party, and Denis Healey, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Healey gained some heat from within the party when he demanded a third ballot after only receiving 38 votes on the second ballot, but it did not end up really mattering as he did not get any votes on the third. David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh wrote in *The British General Election of 1979* (1980) that Callaghan ultimately won due to his age and his middle of the road politics.<sup>1314</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that in the 1979 election, unlike in American politics, the race to the middle was seen as a good thing rather than bad as it is seen here.

<sup>14</sup> Butler and Kavanagh, *The British Election of 1979*, 30.

At this point in time, Callaghan was enjoying lingering success from his time in the Home Office (1967-70) when he had defended the unions in the Labour party's White Paper. He moved up in party ranks after successfully handling issues in Northern Ireland during those same years. More immediately before he was chosen for Prime Minister, he renegotiated the terms of Britain's entrance into the European Economic Community, which kept the Labour party from splitting over disagreements. All of these events made his party believe that he was the best candidate to replace Heath in 1976. Kenneth O Morgan, "James Callaghan: a great PM who, 100 years on, still stands tall," *The Guardian*, March 27, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/mar/27/james-callaghan-prime-minister-centenary>.

One year before Callaghan became Prime Minister, the Conservative party encountered a similar, though more notable rearranging of their top ranking members. Unlike Callaghan, Thatcher was not chosen to replace Edward Heath, former Prime Minister, as the Leader of the Opposition because she was the middle of the road candidate. Quite on the contrary, Thatcher was chosen in part due to her unshakeable far right Conservative values and in part because she was far from the influence of Heath, former Prime Minister and current Leader of the Opposition. When Heath ran for office in the late 1960s, he said that he would be tough on the economy and the unions. However, he was unable to stay true to his word, and his time as Prime Minister was most notably filled with almost endless labor strikes.<sup>15</sup> When he ran again for office in 1974, he asked whether or not the unions or the government ran the country. One year later, with Labour in charge and the unions still striking, it was clear that the answer to his question was not what he had hoped. For some Conservatives, Heath was a leader who had already failed at solving the problems that the country was still facing. Thatcher, strong in her beliefs and known for not backing down, was the opposite. As Secretary of State for Education from 1970-1974, Thatcher had been in the Cabinet, but not close to the party strategizing, thus making her more attractive to people that had felt alienated by Heath. One MP at the time said that he did not believe there were 139 votes<sup>16</sup> for Thatcher within the party at any time, but it was noted that she was the candidate to vote for if the party wanted any kind of change. When it came down to the ballots, Thatcher beat Heath by 11 votes. While she did not have the required majority, Heath resigned immediately, possibly out of embarrassment. The next week, Thatcher acquired 146 votes and won by 67, thus decisively becoming the first female leader of a British political party.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “Edward Heath: A profile of the former UK Prime Minister,” *BBC News*, August 4, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-33772016>.

<sup>16</sup> The number required for victory.

<sup>17</sup> Butler and Kavanagh, 62-63.

Though Thatcher was the first woman to rise as high as she did in either party, she was not the first woman to be prominent in either party. At the same time that Thatcher was breaking new ground for women in the Conservative party, women running for Parliament for the Labour party were struggling to make their own impression as well. The most prominent of these women was Barbara Castle, who won her first election for Parliament in 1945. Castle appears to have had less of a problem with her gender than Thatcher, as there is little that has been said about her election in particular. The issue of gender was more complicated for women within the Labour party because the party was, by definition, more progressive than that of the Conservatives. As Labour issues like union wages and bargaining abilities came more to the forefront of politics towards the late 50s and into the 60s, feminist issues were pushed to the periphery of the party goals. Because of this, female MPs had to toe the line between being too feminist and being feminist enough to be supported by women in order to remain relevant in Parliament. On this issue, Barbara Castle said that she never considered herself to be a female MP, but rather just an MP.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly Thatcher and Castle handed their gender quite differently. For Castle, gender was something that was almost irrelevant. She was a powerhouse within the Labour party regardless of the fact that she was a woman. Even though it was almost expected of her to take on women's issues, or at least address them, she refused to do so until she found an issue that was more general and only tangentially related to feminism, like the turnstiles in the underground.<sup>19</sup> For Labour women in general it seems that gender was less of an issue when they tried to get elected

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<sup>18</sup> Amy Black and Stephen Brooke, "The Labour Party, Women, and the Problem of Gender, 1951-1966," *Journal of British Studies* 36, no. 4 (1997), 445.

<sup>19</sup> In the late 1960s, Castle sponsored a bill to get rid of the turnstiles in the underground because they were built in such a way that certain women's bodies could not get through them. She said that she did not support this bill particularly because it was about women, but rather because it was for the betterment of society in general and just happened to help women the most.

and more of an issue once they were in Parliament. This is the opposite of the way that gender affected Thatcher and her time in Parliament. The public was hyper aware of her gender when she was trying to get elected; they focused on what she wore, how she spoke, and how feminine she appeared to be at any given moment. Thatcher had to make herself appear more sensitive when she was speaking about her extreme values in order to make them more accessible to the public, since the public was less accustomed to hearing women speak in with such force.

However, once she was in Parliament, she was not expected to take on women's issues because they the Conservative party did not particularly care about women's issues. Instead, the problems that she had in Parliament because of her gender were that men refused to take her seriously when she spoke. Clearly, gender was important on both sides of the aisle, but it mattered more for Labour when it came to the issues, and more for the Conservatives it came to the elected officials.

Not only did Thatcher's election as Leader of the Opposition represent a shift in the power of gender within Parliament, but it also represented a shift in the both the tenor and ideological base of Parliament's politics. David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh argue in *The British General Election of 1979*, a retrospective on the election written in 1980, that "Mrs. Thatcher's election was widely represented as a shift to the political right, by supporters and opponents alike."<sup>20</sup> Thatcher immediately began to rub some people the wrong way with her abrasive style of speech and debate.<sup>21</sup> Even before she made it to Prime Minister, she was changing what it meant to be a Conservative because she truly tried to represent her beliefs without backing down.<sup>22</sup> This was somewhat of a concern within the party because she did not believe in compromising with the

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<sup>20</sup> Butler and Kavanagh, 64.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> See chapters 2 and 4 for examples of Conservative leaders agreeing with Labour on controversial issues like welfare because they believed it was a necessary evil, despite the party's general stance against Socialism.

Labour leaders. She additionally did not believe in consensus politics and thus took on her issues in somewhat of a militant fashion. This caused worry within and outside of the party because people believed that her inability to budge on issues might cause instability if the Conservatives were to take the government in the next election. A *Sunday Telegraph* article stated in 1978 that the Conservative Party was one of tolerance, and therefore Thatcher would have to demonstrate that she was understanding of other people's views if she was going to appropriately<sup>23</sup> lead the party.

Thatcher's image of being divisive was fueled by Heath supporters within the party, who were still unsupportive of her victory despite many years having passed since. This bitterness may have been because of the sheer volume of difference between Heath's and Thatcher's styles of leadership. Heath was powerful because of his support from within his Cabinet, whereas Thatcher had more pull with the backbenchers.<sup>24</sup> This support from the backbench thus stands somewhat in opposition with the opinion of the *Telegraph* article, because Thatcher was able to make herself accessible to the wide ranges of Parliament; it just became a matter of making herself accessible to the wide varieties of voters. This would later become a strategy that she and her campaign advisors would use in 1979.

By the turn of 1979, the need for an election was starting to become extreme. Labour's relationship with the unions had broken down and the government was starting to lose confidence in its leader. While things were starting to look dark for Labour, the opposite was happening to the Conservatives. Labour's missteps with the unions had left room for the Conservatives to create a new voter base. In a January 1979 television broadcast, Thatcher

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<sup>23</sup> In this context, the word appropriately means politely. However, later in this thesis the concept of appropriateness will take on a different meaning in the context of Enoch Powell and his racism.

<sup>24</sup> Butler and Kavanagh, 66-67

capitalized on Labour's failings with the unions in order to spread a message of unity. She said, "I recognize how hard this is for the Labour Party, because of their close connection with the unions. Without the unions there would be no Labour Party. Without union money there would be no Labour funds... We have to learn again to be one nation, or one day we shall be no nation."<sup>25</sup> This quote should not necessarily be read as Thatcher supporting the unions and their strikes. Rather, Thatcher is saying that everyone, including those who were striking at the moment must work together and do their part to make Britain great. Though it may have sounded at the offset like she was supporting the unions against the Labour government, she was actually supporting the idea of 'one nation,' a very Conservative idea, reflecting their belief that that only way to succeed is to work hard. In this Thatcher is reminding the public of her own belief that every person should be able to do their own part, ideally without help from the government, thus beginning to establishing the Conservative stance on the unions for the election.

While her "Winter of Discontent" speech made it clear that she was going to be a formidable opponent for Labour, she could not afford mistakes if she wanted to remain in control. Rather than make a campaign out of attacks, the Labour strategy was to wait for Thatcher to make a mistake. The first step in doing this was to start the election at the end of March and therefore drag it out for five weeks. The Labour campaign strategist believed that Thatcher would either work herself up into a characteristic argument within that time, or that her voice would break from the stress of the election. However, the Conservatives negated this perceived advantage by not starting their campaign until mid-April because they were already in the lead. After this, Labour believed that they needed to prompt Thatcher to make a mistake, so they invited her to a debate. Callaghan sent her the invitation to have a debate on television not

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<sup>25</sup> Margaret Thatcher, "Winter of Discontent," (speech, House of Commons, January 17, 1979), Margaret Thatcher Foundation, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103926>.

because he wanted to, but rather because it was something that he needed to do for his image. If Callaghan had not sent in the invitation, he would have looked weak and unwilling to engage with her. Though he would have looked ridiculous if he had lost the debate, they believed that it might have provided a much-needed opportunity for Thatcher to say something detrimental to her campaign. However, even though Callaghan had something to lose from not engaging in the debate, Thatcher had more to lose if she did engage. For her, it was a lose-lose situation if she participated at all. If she participated and did well, she ran the risk of making Callaghan look weak. Her advisors believed that if this happened it would emasculate the male population, who would then be less likely to vote conservative. The consequences of a potential loss in the debate were not any better; if she lost, she would be the one looking weak, and for her that would be attributed to her gender. In the same way that her victory would be applied to all men, her loss would have been applied to all women.<sup>26</sup> Not only would it have shown that she in particular was not strong enough to lead, but it would have shown that no women were strong enough for the job. If Thatcher could not manage to beat Callaghan when she was the strongest woman the party had to offer, then clearly no woman could beat him if they were given the opportunity.<sup>27</sup> Thatcher's strength in this moment was shown in her ability to turn down Callaghan's invitation to make a mistake. By turning him down, she showed that both the party was strong enough without having to go head to head against the opposition, but also that she, as a woman and a candidate, was strong enough without needing to prove herself.

Though Thatcher did not give Labour the gift of a mistake in the form of a debate, a small gaffe did appear in the Thatcher campaign in form of an unfortunate letter. The mistake

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<sup>26</sup> Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, 402.

<sup>27</sup> Though perhaps a false dichotomy because Thatcher's personal politics were also on state, Thatcher was creating a new standard for women just based on her gender, and therefore if she failed in this moment it would be perceived as a failure of gender rather than a failure of politics because a man could have done the debate without question.

actually happened in 1978, but the story did not break until much later. To Thatcher's credit, the gaffe in question did not come directly from her, but rather from her staff. Unfortunately for Thatcher that fact did not much matter, as the sentiments in the letter were attributed to her anyway. The letter in question was written in response to a woman from Erith, who wrote about the bad condition of the council house in her town. One of Thatcher's staffers responded that she should be happy with the accommodations regardless of their condition because she was not the one paying for it (it was paid for by taxes).<sup>28</sup> The insensitive letter was leaked to the *Daily Mirror*, where editors sat on it until a time that they deemed the most damaging to the Conservative campaign.<sup>29</sup> That day was March 30, 1979. The story broke in the morning edition, coloring Thatcher as an insensitive woman who was unwilling to respectfully respond to critics, especially critics making comments about welfare.<sup>30</sup> This portrayal of Thatcher was particularly problematic because sensitivity was something that she worked on her entire career. Due to the odd cadence and tone of her voice, it was often difficult to tell if she was being serious or making fun of an issue. That, in combination with the fact that she was not the most sensitive woman to begin with, made gaffes of this kind more damaging. Her portrayal as insensitive was more problematic from a gender perspective, because it is for that a woman to feel sympathy for her constituents. It would be harder for Thatcher to appear relatable if the public believed that she was an unsympathetic person, especially when one takes into consideration the harsh Conservative values she was trying to sell. Especially in the case of something so small as a badly maintained council building, that situation could have made her look like she did not care about anything having to do with welfare or the lower class.

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<sup>28</sup> Moore, 404.

<sup>29</sup> A questionable choice considering that the Conservative campaign did not officially start until three weeks later.

<sup>30</sup> it is of note that Thatcher never approved the content of the letter.



In the end, the publication of this particular gaffe did not have much political sway because it happened on the same day that Airey Neave's car was bombed by the IRA. As that story rightfully took the attention of the media, the story of Thatcher's gaffe flew by mostly unnoticed.

Even though Thatcher was not particularly hurt by the story, it is important to understand why it would have mattered to her. Had Thatcher been painted as insensitive and thus made out to be mean and not relatable, she probably would not have been able to win the election as easily. Throughout her campaign, Thatcher had to balance her femininity with her politics in the way that she was perceived by the public. If her character were destroyed by this event, she only would have had the issues to go on, and it is unclear if she would have been able to carry strength through those issues if people had lost faith in her as both a candidate and a woman.

The newspapers were not the only place where Thatcher was on display. Throughout her entire campaign, the Conservatives maintained a fairly steady television presence, which escalated aggressively towards the end of April following the publication of the letter and the bombing. Thatcher was featured several times on daily news programs, which followed her doing common things like visiting a farm, talking to people in a factory, or hosting tea within her own home.<sup>31</sup> The choice of these particular activities was important for it served two purposes: making Thatcher appeal to the public at large and making Thatcher appear more feminine. It was important to Thatcher's campaign that she appear more generally likable because the polling numbers showed that Thatcher as a person was polling lower than the Conservative party in general.<sup>32</sup> These

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<sup>31</sup> Butler and Kavanagh, 205-6.

<sup>32</sup> When people were asked whether they supported the Conservative Party or the Labour Party, Conservative won with a margin of around 10%. When people were asked which particular candidate they preferred, Callaghan won by a small margin. Further, the closer it got to polling day (May 5), the smaller the gap was between the two candidates, which could be interpreted as people being less comfortable with Thatcher herself. Ibid.

walkabouts were able to make Thatcher more appealing to the public in several different ways. The first was that they took place all over England. Thatcher's tea tasting took place in Newcastle, the factory she visited was in Milton Keynes, the garment shop was in Leicester, and newborn calf was on a farm in Eye.<sup>33</sup> By placing herself all around the country, Thatcher reminded the public that she was not just the representative for Finchley, but rather a representative for all of England. At a deeper level, she was a representative for all classes of people in England, as opposed to the upper-middle class usually associated with the Conservative Party. It was incredibly important that Thatcher appealed to all levels of the social hierarchy because political scientists at the time were theorizing that class voting was no longer as predictable as it once was. One article published in 1961 suggested that classes did not vote predictably anymore due to the complexity of their self identification. Some people in the middle class might identify as working class and vote Labour because they identified with Labour's goals, while some people in the middle class who identified as working class might vote Conservative because they believed that Conservative might do more to change their quality of life. The article suggests that as class distinctions become more and more nuanced, voting blocs become harder to predict.<sup>34</sup>

Each of Thatcher's walkabout activities could be construed as occupations/activities that people of each social class may have. For example, Thatcher's tea tasting program may have resonated more with middle- and upper-class women who frequently hosted tea for their friends in their homes, while her excursions on the farm and in the garment factory may have struck a cord with men and women of the working class who spent their days doing those same things. Further, while this may not have been intentional, all of the activities represented a particular part of Thatcher's personal life as well. When Thatcher was a child her mother would sew the majority of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 205-6.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Abrams, "Social Class and British Politics," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1961).

her clothes, giving her familiarity with some of the aspects of the garment shop; Thatcher's degree in science from Oxford may have made it easier for her to relate to those in the heart beat tester factor; and her tea tasting may have been representative of her new life as a mother and upper-middle class woman. Even the moment with the baby calf could have been perceived as showing Thatcher's more maternal side, and therefore making her even more relatable to all mothers around the country. By putting Thatcher in all of these different situations, the Conservative Party aimed to show that she was just like everyone else, making her more feminine and therefore more likeable. Thatcher's husband Denis was also present on some of these programs, reminding the public that she was a responsible married woman with a wholesome family of her own. All of these television programs expanded the reach of the Conservative voting base by showing the public the different sides of the Conservative woman that was leading them. If people could relate to Thatcher on every level of her persona, from her politics to her femininity, then they would be more likely to vote for her.

While Thatcher's television appearances were meant to make her appear more friendly, the Conservative ad campaign was meant to make her look like a competent leader.<sup>35</sup> The Conservatives ran five different ads over the course of the five-week election, with each framing the inflation crisis in a different way. The first four ads showed the negative impacts of Labour's inability to control the economy and the unions in various ways. The most powerful of these four ads showed the effects of the different labor strikes, featuring trash in the streets, undug graves, and abandoned buildings. The Conservatives used the powerful images in these four lead-up ads to make Thatcher's message even more powerful in the last ad, which was the only one that featured her personally. The fifth television spot opened up with Thatcher in her office, making a

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<sup>35</sup> These ads ran throughout her entire campaign, with the final ad running just days before polling.

crucial decision in a quiet voice, establishing her control over the room. It continued with the following voice over:

[Thatcher's voice] Many cherished things disappearing: money that keeps its value, real jobs that last, paying our way in the world, feeling safe in the streets, especially if you're a woman, chance for those from modest background like mine to get on. Need change for better now...Never had a woman PM before, but what matters are your convictions. My vision: greatness lies ahead, I know this in my heart. Voice of reason class for balance, for a land where all may grow, safe to work in, walk in, grow up in, grow old in. May this land of ours, which we love so much, find dignity and greatness and peace ahead.<sup>36</sup>

This final ad ties together many important aspects of Thatcher's campaign. The first was redefining what it meant to be a Conservative. The ad states that it is time that Britain go back to being safe for all people and their livelihoods. This recalls the speech that she gave in January of 1979 on the Winter of Discontent, which stated that it was time that everyone starts doing their part for the country. In order for the Britain to be safe, everyone has to start doing their jobs and helping themselves again. Thatcher says that a change is coming that will make the country safe again, and that change is the Conservative Party being back in control.

The most important part of this ad, for the purposes of this thesis at least, comes directly after the line calling for change. Thatcher says that the country has never had a woman Prime Minister before, but what matters are the convictions of the public. Here, Thatcher seems to answer this thesis' central question: Does it matter that Thatcher was a woman? At first read, it seems like this ad would have you believe that it does not matter. But upon further study, it might not be that straightforward. Rather than addressing the fact that she would be the first female Prime Minister, Thatcher immediately moves on to the importance of the public's opinion. This may have been as a way to distract the public from the fact of her gender. If this was the case, then Thatcher seems to have understood that her gender could not be ignored, but recognized that it was not something

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<sup>36</sup> Butler and Kavanagh, 224.

helpful to spend time on and therefore quickly moved on. In this scenario, Thatcher's gender definitely mattered and not in a positive way. The way that the Conservatives handled Thatcher's gender in the campaign seems to support the latter of these readings in a couple different ways. When they were speaking about the issues, particularly when Thatcher was making speeches about the unions and the need for economic reform, Thatcher's gender never came up. In fact, her militant way of speaking and her seeming inability to back down from a fight were helpful in showing that she was ready to fight for the wellbeing of the country. That being said, these particular characteristics are significantly more masculine than the manner of speaking one would stereotypically associate with women, and it could be argued that Thatcher herself employed them to make herself come off as more masculine. If this is the case, then the Conservative strategists may have believed Thatcher's gender to be a detriment to their success and therefore done the most they could to distract the public from it. If that was true, however, why would they have agreed all of the feminine walkabouts on television? Possibly because despite the fact that they wanted to distract from her gender, it was simply too big of a factor to be ignored. Therefore, if they had to acknowledge it, they might as well do it in a way that was going to make it come off as a net positive.

If we agree that Thatcher's gender most certainly mattered in the case of her election, then the question remains as to how much it mattered. This is hard to quantify due to the lack of sources available that deal with Thatcher and her gender. If the video of her television programs were available for public viewing, it may be easier to tell how much work she did to either hide or emphasize her gender. Despite the unavailability of these sources, it is still possible to get a general idea of the importance of her gender in this case. Given that Thatcher personally polled lower than Callaghan, it is possible to construe this difference as having to do with people not wanting her

because she was a woman. However, one also has to factor in Thatcher's general awkwardness in public appearances. Recordings of Thatcher that are available and the way that she has been portrayed in certain films show her to have a clipped way of speaking and possibly off-putting affectation. These factors, rather than her gender, may have been the greater reason for why people liked Callaghan more than her. It could also have been that she was an incredibly smart and able woman, and that may have intimidated men more than anything else.<sup>37</sup> If any or all of these options were the reasons behind why people voted the way they did, then it is clear that Thatcher's gender did matter at least a little in this case. Whether or not Thatcher's gender mattered more or less as her time in office went on, however, remains to be examined.

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<sup>37</sup> There is also the definite possibility that her gender mattered in that it was the first time that a woman could be Prime Minister and that was important. However, it seems unlikely that this would have had as much of an impact on the election then as it would today because people were not voting for the candidates themselves. Though there are not yet sources to back this up with statistics, it seems unlikely to this author that people would switch parties entirely to vote for a woman just for the sake of voting for a woman.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Brixton: Thatcher's Battle Against the Welfare State**

Shortly after 5 PM on April 5, 1981, on the Frontline of Brixton, a young black man with a stab wound found himself surrounded by police officers. The police could have been trying to help the man, or they could have been trying to search him; their motives remain unclear to this day. Regardless of why they were speaking to the man, the police soon found themselves encircled by a group of angry black men armed with bricks. After a small fight between the police and the angry men, the stabbed man was taken to the hospital and the Frontline<sup>38</sup> was cleared. The next day the people of Brixton woke up to a police occupation of the Frontline consisting of police cars parked every 50 yards up and down the road. The day carried on as it usually would until 5 PM when one of the officers was hit in the head with a brick. A police line gathered to try to find the assailant, and soon there were two opposing lines of people: police and agitators. A few more bricks were thrown, but then there was a calm. All of the sudden the agitators charged the cop, and all hell broke loose.<sup>39</sup> This routine of rioting was repeated across the country several more times before the government took any action. In the aftermath of the riots, the government attempted to make some changes to police behavior. Supervisors were added to patrols that were made up of young officers to curb the use of inappropriate force, and riot-protective gear was added to the police uniform. Unfortunately, this was as far as changes to the police force went. The government did not insist on disciplinary action for racially prejudicial acts, nor did they succeed in recruiting any minority officers. This failure on the police front to adapt to diversity and Thatcher's choice not to amend any of her problematic

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<sup>38</sup> The Frontline of Brixton was the primary meeting point between the area of the city that had been gentrified and the area of the city that was referred to as the "inner city." It was a wide street with shops, similar to most Main Streets in small cities or towns.

<sup>39</sup> *We want to riot: the 1981 Brixton uprisings* (London, Riot Not To Work Collective, 1982), 8.

legislation showed a distinct lack of focus on racial tensions from the government.<sup>40</sup> In fact, when called upon by Parliament to simply review some of her laws to see what effect they had on the rise of unemployment and racial tensions, Thatcher deflected the request and said that rather than finding the causes for the riots, one must first congratulate the police for their work in containing the problem.<sup>41</sup>

Much of the literature on the subject of the Brixton riots and the economic and social circumstances that caused the riots falls into two distinct categories: lists of policies and comparisons of Thatcher and her American counterpart, Ronald Reagan. The articles that fit into the first category vary in the type of content they provide depending on their political leanings. For instance, “The Future of the British Welfare State” by Peter Taylor-Gooby describes the political context in which Thatcher made many of her welfare decisions without making any criticism. The tone throughout his entire article is matter-of-fact and uncritical.<sup>42</sup> Given how controversial Thatcher’s policies were, and the highly critical nature of many of the other articles referenced in this thesis, any article lacking in criticism tends to come across as supportive rather than objective. Gooby’s article, though helpful in that it provides the immediate political motivations for Thatcher’s agenda, does not explain how Thatcher’s plan fit in the greater context of Conservatism.<sup>43</sup> More critical articles, such as “Margaret Thatcher’s Law and Order Agenda” by Richard J. Terrill and “Margaret Thatcher and the Inner Cities” by Michael Jacobs also tend to stay away from contextualizing Thatcher’s extreme Conservative values. Instead

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<sup>40</sup> Lord Leslie Scarman, “Prejudice: the stain remains.,” *The Times*, November 25, 1982.

<sup>41</sup> “Riots,” *The Times*, July 7, 1981, accessed March 6, 2014, <http://find.galegroup.com/ttda>.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Taylor-Gooby, “The Future of the British Welfare State: Public Attitudes, Citizenship and Social Policy under the Conservative Governments of the 1980s,” *European Sociological Review* 4, no. 1 (1988).

<sup>43</sup> Taylor-Gooby, “Future of the British Welfare State,” 3.



both of these articles lend a critical eye to Thatcher's inner city policies and describe the backlash against them.<sup>44</sup>

The articles that fall into the second category share the same problem as those previously discussed, as they too tend to stay away from contextualizing Thatcher's policy in the history of Conservatism. Instead they use a comparison between Thatcher and Reagan to frame the policies of each leader. The situating of each politician in relation to the other, rather than in the history of their parties, seems to occur because it makes finding their differences significantly easier. As pointed out by David Hale in "Thatcher and Reagan: Different Roads to Recession" and Dorothy H. Clayton and Robert J. Thompson in "Reagan, Thatcher, and Social Welfare," the two politicians took only slightly different routes towards accomplishing very similar economic goals.<sup>45</sup> In both of these two articles, the parallel nature of the two political agendas lends itself to easier comparison of the effectiveness of both leaders. Drawing on the descriptions of the immediate political motivations for Thatcher's agenda provided in these articles, this chapter argues that Thatcher's social and economic policies stem from her belief in neoliberalism, which is the belief that society is best motivated by financial incentives and not by government handouts. Given the controversial nature of these beliefs, Thatcher was required to step away from the sensitized version of herself that she employed during the 1979 election and rather rely more heavily on her militant, more masculine Iron Lady persona.

Thatcher was born to be a Conservative; she spent her whole life working, never had anything given to her, and earned every commendation and promotion she ever had. To her, the

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<sup>44</sup> Richard J. Terrill, "Margaret Thatcher's Law and Order Agenda," *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 37, no. 3 (1989) and Michael Jacobs, "Margaret Thatcher and the Inner Cities," *Economic and Political Weekly* 23, no. 38 (1988).

<sup>45</sup> David Hale, "Thatcher and Reagan: Different Roads to Recession," *Financial Analysts Journal* 37, no. 6 (1981) and Dorothy H. Clayton and Robert J. Thompson, "Reagan, Thatcher, and Social Welfare: Typical and Nontypical Behavior for Presidents and Prime Ministers," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1988).

idea that someone might be given an opportunity in life without working for it was anathema. She believed that any inner-city discontent came from the socialist agenda, which was in her mind based on the idea of handouts.<sup>46</sup> Less obviously, she was almost certainly racist. When Enoch Powell made his controversial “River of Blood” speech, Thatcher was supportive of the idea, however she understood that to be too outwardly supportive would be politically questionable. She too believed in an image of the ideal “British” man, and that man resembled Winston Churchill much more than someone from Jamaica or India. The laws she supported and the policies she made in the first three years of her ministership seemed to be based on these beliefs, not out of malice or hatred for the immigrant and poor communities supported by welfare, but rather out of the belief that they were not “British” because they did not work hard enough to qualify. In this instance, her gender almost certainly did not come into play. As we examine the origins of welfare and the cultivation of anti-immigrant feeling in Britain, it will become clear that feminine sensitivity was at no point something that Thatcher put into her law making or her public statements. In this moment, the only thing that mattered was her Conservative identity. In the time between her election and the Falklands War, being a Conservative meant being hard and determined to fix the economy above all else, even if it meant watching society break down.

Thatcher’s election campaign left the electorate with two personas of the Prime Minister: Our Maggie, the thoughtful, more relatable woman, and the Iron Lady, the hard Conservative representative that was going to lead the country out of crisis. In the months immediately following the election, Our Maggie was pushed to the side due and the Iron Lady was ushered in to deal with the chaos that the former Labour government had left behind. The unions demanded

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<sup>46</sup> Moore, 460.

that their wages be increased, and went on strike when they were not. At the same time, the steady rise of the inflation rate was leading the British economy to the breaking point.<sup>47</sup> Labour had not done nearly enough to fix the problem while they were in office, making a Conservative win in the election almost inevitable. Yet the crisis did not end with their win. It was fitting, therefore, in the face of such a crisis, that the first thing Thatcher had to do after being elected was to fix the budget. Constructing the budget was more complicated than just deciding what to cut and where to cut from; Thatcher had to find a balance between her own strict Conservative values and the needs of the public.

There are two aspects of Thatcher's Conservative beliefs that are important to the formation of this budget and the effects that it would have on society after it was passed. The first is Thatcher's monetarist economic point of view. Thatcher was a supporter of monetarist policy, meaning that she believed that expanding the money supply was inherently inflationary and that monetary authorities should only focus on maintaining price stability,<sup>48</sup> because it seemed more logical to her than the Keynesian system of borrow-and-spend, which went against her personal values. Her main goals in forming her budgets was to cut borrowing as much as possible, but in order to make that happen she had to drastically cut the budget. She believed that getting the economy back in order would be as easy as cutting taxes, cutting borrowing and spending, and letting interest rates rise to cover the rest.

Finding a place to cut the budget was easy for Thatcher due to the second important aspect of her Conservative values: her hatred of the welfare state. Following World War II, welfare was accepted as a necessary way of rebuilding a country ravaged by war. Every Prime

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<sup>47</sup> See Richard Coopey and Nicholas Woodward, *Britain in the 1970s: The Troubled Economy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) for more information on the economic crisis.

<sup>48</sup> Merriam Webster, s.v. "monetarism," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/monetarism>.

Minister from the war onwards, regardless of political party, worked with the welfare system. Thatcher was the first to overtly say no. For her, welfare was society's crutch, a system made for people that chose not to work hard enough to support themselves.<sup>49</sup>

Thatcher's lofty goals of tempering inflation, shifting the tax burden, and cutting welfare were tempered by the realities of the country's economic situation. The first thing Thatcher did was bend to the will of the unions and allow for a large public sector wage increase.<sup>50</sup> Sources do not mention why she did this, but it would make sense to appease the unions only so far as it would allow her to complete the rest of her agenda. With the unions back at work, society would go back to normal, and the economy might be stimulated enough to allow for the more drastic changes she wanted to make. This plan unfortunately went bad almost immediately for reasons entirely outside of Thatcher's control. At almost the same moment as the agreement with the unions, Britain became an exporter of North Sea oil, whose value had recently doubled due to the OPEC oil crisis in 1979. This was both good and bad. The good side of this was that foreign markets rushed in to buy the oil and the pound, thus raising the value of the pound within world markets. This meant that it was easier for British people to buy imported goods because they were cheaper than they previously had been. The negative of this event was that it made British exports harder to sell because they were valued higher.<sup>51</sup> Due to this, British manufacturers could no longer compete on a global scale, and had to downsize. Within the first year of Thatcher's time as Prime Minister, the population of the Britain that was unemployed doubled, going from 1.5 million people to 3 million.

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<sup>49</sup>Clayton and Thompson, "Reagan, Thatcher, and Social Welfare, 568.

<sup>50</sup>Hale, "Thatcher and Reagan: Different Roads to Recession," 61.

<sup>51</sup>Will Hutton, "Thatcher's Half-Revolution," *The Wilson Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1987), 126.

Along with endeavoring to fix the economy, Thatcher also sought to return Britain to a state of neoliberalism, thus striking directly at the heart of what the welfare system was and why it was created. Neoliberalism describes a way of thinking that is a reinterpretation of old Liberal values. At the core of Classical Liberal beliefs was the concept that people would be the most efficient if they were given financial incentive.<sup>52</sup>

The welfare system, therefore, was the tangible representation of the opposite of neoliberal values. The welfare state was born out of a society that had just been ravaged by World War II. In the aftermath of the war, the British public said goodbye to Churchill, who had provided strong leadership through the hard times, and ushered in Clement Attlee, Churchill's Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the Labour Party. Attlee had in part been able to win the election because he had been successfully able to separate Churchill into two separate personas: the great war bulldog and the party leader for the Conservatives.<sup>53</sup> Once Attlee was in office, he went about making the Beveridge Report, which outlined the "cradle to grave" welfare system, into law. In its simplest form, the Beveridge Report set up a system in which the general public would pay a small flat insurance rate and would receive health care, pensions, and social security in return.<sup>54</sup> Even Churchill, who in 1945 said that the state would need some sort of "Gestapo" to regulate the new "socialist" state, saw the necessity of the system. When he came back into power in 1951 he said this of his plans for how to deal with welfare: "What the nation needs is several years of quiet steady administration, if only to allow Socialist legislation to reach its full fruition."<sup>55</sup> This sentiment is important because it shows someone who believed that "British"

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<sup>52</sup> This led to the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1842, which limited the amount of social welfare services a person could receive.

<sup>53</sup> Philip Abbott, "Leadership by Exemplar: Reagan's FDR and Thatcher's Churchill," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 2 (1997), 197.

<sup>54</sup> This program was legally established in the National Insurance Act of 1946.

<sup>55</sup> Abbott, "Leadership by Exemplar," 198.

was synonymous with “Conservative” could also believe that the welfare state was absolutely a necessary part of British life. The fact that Churchill himself held this belief would probably have been hard for Thatcher to understand given how much she idolized him. Philip Abbott argues that rather than try to understand this aspect of Churchill’s perspective, she ignored it and focused more on the parts of his persona that agreed with her own beliefs. Thus, rather than accepting what was necessary for the prosperity of society, she focused more on the fact that the welfare state was a socialist system, and, as far as she was concerned, socialism was the enemy of Britain.<sup>56</sup>

When she was theoretically striking at the nebulous enemy that was socialism, the people that Thatcher was really attacking when she cut back welfare were the ones that needed it most: the low-income and immigrant populations. While one might think that it is counterproductive to take benefits away from the people that need them to keep themselves afloat, Thatcher believed that this was the way to really incentivize them to work harder. This particular Conservative belief, however, may not have been Thatcher’s only incentive for striking at those particular groups of people.

If there was ever one thing that Margaret Thatcher was not known for it was racial sensitivity. In fact, Thatcher was a supporter of one of the most outwardly racist Conservative MPs of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Enoch Powell. On April 20, 1968, Powell gave the controversial speech that would later be called the “Rivers of Blood” speech. Powell gave the speech in order to speak against the Race Relations Amendment of 1968, which, if passed, would make it illegal to refuse housing, employment, or public services to someone based on their race, color, or ethnicity. In the speech, Powell recounts a conversation that he had with a middle-aged white

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<sup>56</sup> A seemingly antiquated idea reinvigorated by the Cold War. Abbott, 198.

constituent, who said to him that he would move his children out of the country if he could because he did not want to live in a country where the black man would “hold the whip” over the white man in “10 year’s time.” In response to this man’s claim, Powell says that it is not in his power to simply “shrug” at this problem, but rather as the question, “How can its dimensions be reduced?”<sup>57</sup> He goes on to argue that the country must be mad to allow the entrance of 5,000 immigrant children per year, and that to allow them to settle is an even worse problem. The rest of the speech only continues to escalate the hate speech, saying that it is not discrimination against the immigrants that live in the country to not want to pass the Race Relations Act, but rather discrimination against those to come.<sup>58</sup> Finally, he puts the nail in his political career’s coffin when he says that he does not want British people (white people) to wake up as a stranger in their own country.<sup>59</sup>

It is within this economic and social environment that the scope and implications of Thatcher’s welfare legislation can be understood. Thatcher believed that providing incentives for private firms and individuals to succeed on their own was the only way that she could save the country. She thought that the best way to accomplish this would be to cut taxes, so that they could save their money, and to cut welfare, so that the government had the money to back the tax cuts and so that people had to try harder to be successful. Dorothy Clayton and Robert Thompson argue that Thatcher thought that it was her responsibility to educate the public about the nature of their own problems and how to solve them. In cutting the welfare state to its bare bones, Thatcher was teaching the public that their problem was laziness and that the way to solve it was to stop relying on the government and to find a way unrelated to the government to get the

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<sup>57</sup> Enoch Powell, “Rivers of Blood” (speech, Birmingham, April 20, 1968), *The Times*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html>.

<sup>58</sup> It is unclear how this distinction makes the situation any better.

<sup>59</sup> Enoch Powell, “Rivers of Blood.”

same benefits that welfare provided.<sup>60</sup> Teaching this harsh lesson required that Thatcher step away from the sensitive and relatable version of herself that she portrayed during the election, and instead step back into the militant and abrasive personality that she had been known for in Parliament. Thatcher believed that society was falling apart under the sympathetic rule of the welfare state and therefore required a firmer hand to teach it how to succeed on its own. Thatcher had five strategies for breaking down the welfare system: 1. To use the regular budget process to reduce rates of growth in pension and alter regulations regarding pension eligibility; 2. To use the regular budget process to reduce income tax and increase capital gains and mortgage tax; 3. To use the regular budget process to increase fees for various NHS services, increase employee contribution to the NHS, reduce/eliminate benefits to strikers' families, home assistance to the elderly, free school programs, employed youths, increase rent for council houses, and shift the tax burden to the lower-middle class; 4. Set spending limits for NHS and local governments, forcing them to reduce services; and 5. Increase the national government's involvement in local programs as a means of standardizing and limiting the flexibility of local governments.<sup>61</sup>

Instead of decreasing the amount of people on welfare, her benefits cuts made it so more people had to be on welfare just to survive. At first glance, it is clear that all of these goals are aimed at forcing the lower and lower-middle classes to work and create benefits for themselves. When put into practice, they had almost the opposite affect. Rather than incentivizing people to work, these practices made it harder for people to get by in their daily lives. At the same time that unemployment benefits were getting cut, manufacturing plants and factories were being shut down due to the rise of British export costs, therefore it was both almost impossible to get/keep a job and live without one. In a more immediate sense, poor people started paying more taxes than

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<sup>60</sup> Clayton and Thompson, 567.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 569.



they were before with less money than they had to begin with. This, in combination with the fact that more people were losing their jobs, made Thatcher's goal of reducing the welfare system an impossibility.<sup>62</sup>

Hoping for more success in her attempts to fix the social problems that she believed stemmed from the influx of immigrants into the country and the dead-beat life style of those living entirely off of welfare, Thatcher unleashed a militant policy agenda that attempted to limit the movements of those problematic populations. Powell's controversial opinions on race, though unpopular amongst the majority of the Conservative party at the time, were shared by Thatcher. Though unable to publicly support the specific comments that Powell made in his "Rivers of Blood" speech, she did support the general sentiments of his statements. Her belief for Powell's ideas later manifested themselves in the passing of the British Nationality Act of 1981. In an effort to reduce crime, which she believed was committed primarily by black youths, the British Nationality Act limited the amount of immigrants who could legally settle in the country.

The Act achieved this by establishing three categories of citizenship. The first category was for people that had ties to the country or the Commonwealth that was determined by immigration laws, which applied to most people living in Britain. Only those people had the legal right to live in the country. The second category was for people who lived in the Dependent Territories, which included the Falklands, Gibraltar, and Hong Kong, and allowed those people to have citizenship dependent on the immigration laws of their particular countries. The final category was for people that were citizens of the United Kingdom and the colonies that but were somehow excluded from the first group, and those people had no right to live in the country.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 570.

<sup>63</sup> Richard J. Terrill, "Margaret Thatcher's Law and Order Agenda," *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 37, no. 3 (1989), 434-436.

Through a series of legal hoops, this last status disproportionately included many black and West Indian immigrants, and affectively limited the number of those groups who were allowed to enter the country.

Thatcher further restricted movements of the black and immigrant populations that could legally live in Britain under that 1981 law with the Criminal Attempts Act of 1981. This act was passed in an attempt to right the wrongs that were occurring under section 4 of the 1824 Vagrancy Act. Under section 4 (SUS), police officers were allowed to arrest people that they believed to be suspected of committing a crime. By the 1970s, this had escalated to the point of police arresting people they believed to be about to pickpocket someone or steal a car. In order to have a valid arrest under SUS, the police needed to have two witnesses, usually the two police officers on duty to corroborate the story, and then those witnesses had to have witnessed two separate acts. After the “suspect” was arrested, they were taken to a trial without a jury, so the police just had to convince a judge that they had made a valid arrest. As one might predict, this law began to disproportionality effect young black men that the police perceived as “loitering.”<sup>64</sup> After a series of complaints were brought against the act, the Criminal Attempts Act was passed in March 1981. This Act repealed section 4 of the Vagrancy Act and established new parameters for arresting people suspected of interfering with a vehicle.<sup>65</sup> This new standard was probably left intentionally vague, and needless to say it did not go far enough to rectify the discriminatory problems of section 4.

Thatcher did not have to wait long for a reaction to the relative failure of the Criminal Attempts Act. Not only did the problematic nature of the Act itself incite action, but the mystery of how it got passed might also have been a source of inspiration for the rioters. Despite reading

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<sup>64</sup> Terrill, “Law and Order,” 437-8.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

Parliamentary debates on the Act, articles on the Act, and lists of groups that provided evidence against the Act, I have been unable to deduce where exactly this Act found support. From what I have been able to find, it seems like this Act was passed by Thatcher's force of will alone.

Four major race riots took place around England in July of 1981. Rather than addressing the insurmountable racial tension in the rioting areas, Thatcher's deflections of questions about the riots got worse as the riots continued. After the riot in Liverpool she emphasized that the people should not forget that there were 200 police injuries in the riots and that the "law must be upheld." She outright refused to acknowledge, and possibly believe, that the unemployment caused by her economic policies was the cause of the riots.

Because of this, she found herself severely limited in her abilities to temper the violence. As discussed before, she made some attempts to shore up police protection and gear, but that was as far as she went. She appointed Lord Scarman as head of the inquiry into the matter, but when he came back to her with information that pointed to unemployment being the cause of the riots she politely thanked him for his service and sent him on his way. Scarman was certainly not the last person who attempted to get her to see the situation clearly. When a news report commented on the crisis in July, she went so far as to say that not only was the problem caused because of bad Labour policies, but also that it was because the people that were rioting were brought up on TV and not much else.<sup>66</sup> In a story that President Reagan told later, he said that when he expressed his sympathies about the riots, she said that he shouldn't worry because it was just boys being boys.

Thatcher's inability to see the real causes of the riots when they were staring her in the face can be understood in two different ways. First, that her eagerness to blame the riots only on

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<sup>66</sup> Moore, 635.

the rioters and the apparent ease with which she answered questions about the violence acted as a means of bolstering her own beliefs about the different socio-economic levels of society.

Thatcher spent most, if not all, of her adult life believing that a person had to work to earn all of their success. In her eyes, the rioters were young men who had never tried to get a job and instead had spent their whole life scrounging money and benefits first from their parents and later from the government. While this characterization may have been true of some of the rioters, it discounts the majority of people who had lost their jobs, had been born into a system of poverty, or who the system of immigration had systematically disenfranchised. For most of the people who were rioting, it did not matter whether or not they tried to get a job; the economy was working against them in three separate ways. The first, as discussed previously, was that factory closure made it almost impossible for laborers to find long term employment. The second was that labor unions were telling the workers to strike even though it was no longer productive for them to do so with Thatcher's benefits cuts. Even if the workers did try to strike for better pay or benefits, it would have hurt their families because they could no longer collect their spouse's benefits while the strike was going on. The third reason was gentrification; many middle class families were moving to the outskirts of the inner city at the same time that the economy was collapsing. In order to make way for the improved housing structures, inner city families were evicted and made homeless. Though perhaps not directly tied to the job market, the homelessness led to a rise in the inner city's general feeling of despair, and thus made the environment less conducive to hard labor.

Along with the wide sweeping lowering of morale, gentrification predictably caused problems when the original population of the inner city came into contact with its new inhabitants. With the new middle class inhabitants sometimes came the entitled, unemployed

white youth populations, which stood in stark contrast with the unemployed immigrant and nonwhite populations that were already there.

While Thatcher may not have been right about the motivations of the black rioters, she was certainly correct when it came to these white equivalents. In their case, they did feel that they were entitled to jobs that they believed were being taken away by the immigrants that were now their neighbors.<sup>67</sup> This belief led to increased racial tensions in the inner city, which were later capitalized upon by police acting under the sus (search and seizure) law. Given her already controversial opinions about race and inner city populations, it would have been easy for Thatcher to believe that the white youths' feelings of entitlement were shared with all of the youths of the inner city, and therefore she could have easily attributed the riots to those immature feelings, rather than the causes of their unemployment and poverty.

The second way that Thatcher's refusal to acknowledge the real causes of the riots could be explained is that it was a defense mechanism. Her biographer, Charles Moore, says that she responded flippantly to questions about the riots because she knew that she was powerless to stop them.<sup>68</sup> She knew that the situation was too far out of hand to change without a massive overhaul of her own policies. To fix the problem would have meant a reinstatement of the welfare system to an even larger degree, which is something that she never would have done. Rather than face the problem and try to fix it in a way that would probably have destroyed her legacy and gone against everything she believed in, she chose to put the problem aside and wait for it to sort itself out. In doing so, she defended herself both from the acknowledgement that she had caused hardship for 2.5 million of her people and from having to go back on her own values.

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<sup>67</sup> John Rex, "The 1981 urban riots in Britain," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 6, no. 1 (1982), 103.

<sup>68</sup> Moore, 635.

It would be inappropriate to say that these issues of economic crisis and racial tensions were solved by the spring of 1983, where the next chapter begins. In fact, it may seem abrupt to end the story of this tumultuous moment in British history here. However, the abruptness is appropriate when one considers the events as they actually happened. Yes, Thatcher did find herself with her lowest approval rating of all time in this moment, and yes, society was falling apart at the seams. But it is with this background in mind that one can understand the true magnitude of Thatcher's success in the Falklands War. In the moment in which this chapter is set, it looked as if Thatcher would be booted out of office and quite possibly the Conservative party because of her massive failings on almost every domestic front. No one would have expected that she would succeed in a foreign war and save herself and her legacy. At the end of the next chapter, it will be clear how Thatcher was able to pull herself out of this moment of despair and into another two terms as Prime Minister.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> For a greater discussion of how Thatcher engaged with welfare and labor issues in the latter portion of her time as Prime Minister, please look to the Conclusion of this thesis.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Falklands War: Thatcher's Moment of Nostalgia and Empire**

Towards the end of the first Parliamentary debate on the likelihood of war in the Falklands, Enoch Powell said of Thatcher, "In the next week or two this house, the nation and the right honorable lady herself will learn of what metal she is made."<sup>70</sup> By this point in her Prime Ministership Thatcher was already called the Iron Lady, but the war was the first true test of that image that she faced in office.<sup>71</sup> Though her encounters with the unions and their labor strikes in the years before the war were harrowing experiences, a more global challenge to Thatcher's legacy, and to the legacy of Britain as a global player, was imminent. The British Empire was an ideal that Thatcher believed in whole-heartedly, despite the fact that the Empire had already lost the vast majority of her colonies by the time Thatcher was in office. She believed that Britain was among the strongest nations of the world, and that every British person should do their part in defending that pride. That she could be the one in charge when Britain lost the Falklands was a nightmare for the Prime Minister. Losing, for her, was not an option worth entertaining. Though people were against her at every step of the war, Thatcher was adamant that the ideals of the Empire were worth fighting for. She was rewarded for her efforts in more ways than one. The war lasted less than two months, and by the end she had returned the Falklands securely to British control and shown that Britain was still the powerful country of her youth. The victory in the war helped propel Thatcher into the success of the rest of her time as Prime Minister. For Thatcher and her legacy, the Falklands were more than just a group of small islands

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<sup>70</sup> Moore, 673.

<sup>71</sup> Up until recently, when a member of the Red Army came forward and said that he allegedly created the nickname, it was generally believed that the nickname "Iron Lady" was given to Thatcher by the Kremlin in 1976. Will Stewart, "Revealed: Red Army colonel who dubbed Maggie the Iron Lady...and changed the story," *Daily Mail*, February 24, 2007.

in the South Atlantic, they were the key to cementing her views on what it meant to be British and what it meant to have Margaret Thatcher, a strong Conservative woman, as Prime Minister.

Much of the literature on Thatcher and the Falklands focuses either on the military and political tactics of the government or how Thatcher used the war in her 1983-4 campaign. When Charles Moore discusses the war in his biography of Thatcher, he focuses mostly on the way that Thatcher navigated the war politically, spending the majority of his time speaking about Thatcher's relationship with Reagan and his Secretary of State Al Haig. More particularly, Moore describes the relationship as one where Thatcher used Reagan and his administration as a middle man in Britain's negotiations with Argentina. Thatcher and Reagan's relationship became complicated due to this issue because, while Reagan wanted to support Thatcher as a friend, supporting how Britain was dealing with Argentina was a more complex issue. At the time of the war, America was trying to strengthen its relationship with certain South American countries in their effort to stop communism from spreading. For that mission to be effective, Reagan had to allow for some support for Argentina in general. Because of this, his dealings with Thatcher were a little less supportive than she would have hoped. Thatcher wanted to have American support in their military endeavors because she believed that Britain deserved it. Al Haig, Reagan's Secretary of State, disagreed. Instead of supporting her militarily, Haig did his best to make diplomatic negotiations successful between the two countries. It was only when Argentina rejected the proposed peace plans for the seventh time that Reagan and Haig could finally justify supporting Britain in their military efforts.<sup>72</sup>

The second context in which scholars usually talk about the Falklands is when they talk about the election of 1983. This election was incredibly important for Thatcher because before

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<sup>72</sup> Moore, 683-690.



the war even she was convinced that she would not win. In fact, part of the reason why she appointed Francis Pym to her Cabinet was because she thought he would be her replacement in the next election.<sup>73</sup> Before the war, Thatcher faced the worst poll numbers any Prime Minister had earned since World War II, the formation of a new “modern” political party, and opposition from within her own party. Some Conservatives in particular believed that the Falklands would be like a repeat of the Suez crisis and completely ruin her. Fortunately for Thatcher and unfortunately for everyone else, the opposite happened. William Mishler, Marilyn Hoskin, and Roy Fitzgerald argue that Thatcher’s victory in the Falklands gave the Conservatives a boost because it made Thatcher appear capable of maintaining the stability and prosperity of the country. They write that public perceptions of economic stability in any given moment can either increase or decrease the amount of support they have for the government.<sup>74</sup> This was particularly helpful for Thatcher in the moments after the war because the public was so distracted by the victory that they forgot the disasters of the previous two years.

There are a few reasons why scholars frequently conflate Thatcher’s actions and behaviors during the war with those after. First, Thatcher hid inside 10 Downing for the first few weeks of the war in order to focus on negotiations and military plans, two things that she thought were more important than any media appearance at the time. Because of this, there is an absence of primary source material from this moment. Though this moment is frequently skipped by scholars, I believe that the lack of material is just as important because her lack of public appearance at the time gives us information about her priorities at the time. Second, some scholars believe that Thatcher started building up for her next campaign in the victory period of

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 675.

<sup>74</sup> William Mishler, Marilyn Hoskin, and Roy Fitzgerald, “British Parties in the Balance: A Time Series Analysis of Long-Term Trends in Labour and Conservative Support,” *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1989), 214.

the war and that that “victory” period started after the re-taking of South Georgia. The fact that they consider victory to have started halfway through the war necessarily leads to a conflation of events that happened during the war and immediately after. (For this chapter, I will consider the war to have ended on the day of Argentina’s surrender, June 14, 1982.)

This chapter argues that, by that victory day in 1982, Thatcher’s identity as the Iron Lady was solidified, and the definition of what it meant to be a Conservative woman at that time was made clear. That is not to say she was not still struggling with this identity as the war unfolded. Her support numbers were dismal, after all. She was dealing with a Britain that felt that she was racist, that she had no compassion for the unemployed, and that she had almost single-handedly ruined the British economy. The people probably would have hated her more had they known that the War was caused in part by negligent foreign policies that left the Falklands in a sort of political limbo. Nevertheless, Thatcher did manage to win the War through keen military maneuvers and not a little bit of luck, thus allowing her to move forward in her mission to turn Britain into the Conservative country that she idealized. To understand how she was able to transform Britain in this moment, I will analyze the tone and word choice in speeches she gave during the war, particularly ones made to the Mid-Bedfordshire Conservatives and to the Women’s Conservative Conference, to show how traditional British values shaped the way Thatcher encouraged female support. I will further analyze her reasons for idealizing the “Falklands man” and discuss why that was important for her larger idea of what it meant to be British. Through an understanding of these speeches and the values that Thatcher promoted, we will be able to better understand how her definitions of what it meant to be a Conservative and a woman during war times might have shifted from what they were when she first took office.

When Thatcher was first elected in 1979, being a Conservative woman meant that she had to sugarcoat her words so that her harsh policies would be more palatable to the public.<sup>75</sup> This was almost the opposite of what she had to do during war times. Instead of making her messages appear softer, Thatcher had to appear harder, more stable, and almost masculine in order to make the country believe that she had everything under control. In this instance, being a Conservative meant understanding that war was a necessary way of freedom to those in the Empire without it, and being a Conservative woman meant being supportive of doing whatever it took to achieve that freedom.

Thatcher decided from the very beginning of the conflict that she was not going to give up control of the islands, even if it meant going to war. To no one's surprise, Thatcher's opposition in Parliament, both on the Labour side and within her own party, was against her immediately. They were instead in favor a leaseback agreement in which Britain would give Argentina control of the Falklands for ninety-nine years, after which control would go back to the British. Parliament was in favor of this idea due to the tricky economic situation that the country was in at that time. Following the labor crisis of 1981-2, the British government, was still desperately in need of operating funds, and therefore found itself facing extreme budget cuts. In an untimely coincidence, the government had also just agreed to give money to NATO, which meant that budget cuts would have to come from the Navy.<sup>76</sup> Ironically, the largest cut that was made was the decommissioning of the *Endurance*, a ship that was used at the time to patrol the waters around the Falklands. For the Argentinians, the *Endurance's* decommissioning showed that the British were either unwilling or did not care to defend the Falklands.<sup>77</sup> This, combined

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<sup>75</sup> With the exception of the ads discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>76</sup> Moore, 660-6.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

with feelings that the British didn't care to work with them diplomatically,<sup>78</sup> meant that the Falklands and the government could not do anything about it.

As invasion was inevitable, the problem became how the government was going to deal with it. The first problem was a semantic one. They could not call the invasion an "invasion" because that would imply that they had already given up power of the island.<sup>79</sup> Instead, the government's word was that they were engaged in a fight to "maintain British administration."<sup>80</sup> With the semantic battle taken care of, Parliament turned their heads to the actual battle. This task was significantly harder than deciding what to call the war. Thatcher failed to rouse even Conservative support for a counter-strike the morning after the invasion. Regardless of their lack of support, however, the invasion took place and Parliament had to accept it. With help from Americans Reagan and Haig, Thatcher was able to continue some negotiations with the Argentinians. The Argentinians, however, had different ideas. After they had rejected several proposals, it became clear to Thatcher and the British government that a physical fight was inevitable.

Between the lack of diplomatic success and the potential for loss of life in a physical battle, both public and Parliamentary opinions of Thatcher were getting lower and lower. People later said that Thatcher was out of her depths, stuttering and speaking without the conviction for

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<sup>78</sup> This is a complicated issue. The previous administration had had dealings with the Argentinians that ended with them pretty much forgetting about negotiations and leaving the Argentina with nothing. The leaseback agreement was the last in a long line of half-baked agreements that the Argentinians rejected. They rejected the agreement both because of Britain's carelessness and because the new dictator, Galtieri, had to make a show of strength in order to maintain his image of an all-powerful leader. Given the motives of both Galtieri and Thatcher, diplomacy never stood a chance.

<sup>79</sup> Some media outlets at the time ran stories that the small military force that was stationed at the island had given up immediately. The truth was that they had actually put up quite a good fight and then failed. Unclear as to which image was worse for the British people at the time.

<sup>80</sup> The semantic battle continued after the fighting started because the war could not technically be called a "war." Instead, Thatcher had to call it a "conflict" because Parliament needed to declare a war and Parliament was too cumbersome to do so.

which she was known.<sup>81</sup> People continued to believe this and approval ratings continued to sink until the first British victory in the conflict, the re-taking of South Georgia.<sup>82</sup>

Public opinion soared after the victory in South Georgia, which allowed for Thatcher to come into her own when it came to media appearances.

Though she was able to make British feel like the proud country of past times in that particular moment, the public was still hyper-aware that a military victory meant that there had been fighting, and fighting meant there was potential loss of life. Because of this hyper-awareness, Thatcher's public support rested on the needle-head of success. If they continued to win bloodlessly, then the public would support her; if they lost battles, the public would turn on her once again. The latter happened following the sinking of the Argentinian *Belgrano* and the British *Sheffield*.<sup>83</sup> Fortunately for Thatcher and Britain at large, the military was shortly able to gain the all important foothold on the Falkland's beach. With that, the invasion/conflict/war was over. The British, and more importantly Thatcher, had won.

The first of Thatcher's major speeches during the Falklands war came after the victory in South Georgia, an island in the Falklands region that the British used as a base before it was taken by Argentina. The timing of this speech is significant because it furthers the idea that Thatcher did not want to make herself available to the public until she had good news to relay. In the beginning of the war, her messages to the public were more somber, asking for patience in the troubling times; after South Georgia, she started using words like "might, right, and majesty," harkening back to speeches that Churchill had made during World War II in which he used the same words.<sup>84</sup> It is important to analyze the first speech that she made during the war both

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 672.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 680.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 716.

<sup>84</sup> Abbott, "Leadership by Exemplar," 198

because it finally gave the public some insight into how she was going to justify her reasons for war, and because it shows Thatcher's admiration for the leaders of the past, as well as her unyielding British pride.

The speech itself was not originally planned as a speech about the Falklands. Rather, it was a celebratory speech about the two members of Parliament that had represented the Mid-Bedfordshire constituency for the preceding 50 years.<sup>85</sup> Thatcher quickly used the fact that MP Alan Boyd had been in Parliament since the 1930s to transition to an exposition on British ideals. She quotes Boyd when he said, "To this Commonwealth we offer the Crown of England as a symbol worthy of its ideals."<sup>86</sup> Thatcher took this statement to mean that whenever Britain fights, it fights for more than just a "standard of living" or an "income tax bracket."<sup>87</sup> Instead, Britain fights for a way of life that is better than anywhere else. She continues that she was reminded of that speech when she was speaking to her Secretary-General about what was taking place in the Falklands. She adds that her Secretary-General finished his comments by saying that "[the Commonwealth] recognizes that unless some country says 'stop' to invaders, then the whole world will be liable to invasion of their territory..."<sup>88</sup> The irony in this statement is almost profound. One of the most basic things that one could understand about Thatcher and her belief systems is that she never would have thought for a second that the British Empire was a source of anything but good. Her intentional ignorance of the dark side of Empire is especially clear here when she says that it is Britain's responsibility to say "no" to other invading countries since Britain was always the one invading in the height of Empire. While this kind of irony might have

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<sup>85</sup> Though not central to the point of this speech, it is interesting to note that at the beginning of the speech Thatcher made a joke about her own age, which endeared her to the crowd and also made her seem more human.

<sup>86</sup> Margaret Thatcher, "Speech to Mid-Bedfordshire Conservatives (Falklands) (speech, Bedfordshire, April 30, 1982), Margaret Thatcher Foundation, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104929>.

<sup>87</sup> This statement, though in the speech used to spread a message of unity, could also have been a jab at the Labour party, which was known for fighting only for the welfare state.

<sup>88</sup> Thatcher, "Speech to Mid-Bedfordshire Conservatives."

been expected in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when people had less knowledge about the actual violence of empire, it was less acceptable by the 1980s. By that point, people had access to information about what the Empire had been like and most had lived through the process of losing the colonies, therefore giving Thatcher less of an excuse to idealize the notion of empire. Rather than referring to that darker side of empire, which would admittedly have been an odd thing to point out in a celebratory speech, she instead is referring to a greater time in history when Britain was a defender against invasion: World War II.<sup>89</sup>

It is this reference to the World War II era that allows Thatcher to get to the meat of her feelings on British pride. She does so by pointing out the difference between Britain then and Britain now (with now being 1982) by saying,

When Alan became a member for this constituency there were certain very obvious features about our country. We were a country of might, oh yes, a very very powerful nation, recognized the world over. But even more than being a country of might, we were a country of right and we were a country of majesty. Might, right and majesty. Might, oh great might. We were after all a very great Empire and Commonwealth. Let us never forget that when we stood in the cause of right that the whole Empire and Commonwealth which Alan had done so much to create came to stand by us to see that the things in which we believed should survive and endure.<sup>90</sup>

This passage of the speech is an example of the rhetoric that Thatcher was known for. For her, the Britain of the past was the most ideal version of the country, and the one that existed in her present was a disappointment. She returns to this time of greatness as a way to possibly justify her actions in the Falklands. It is not only the right of the British people, but a duty and mandate to go out and defend countries that needed to be defended from invasion. While she later goes on to acknowledge that Britain was no longer the great world power that it was in the time that she was referring to, she does include her belief that Britain still serves as an advisor country to the

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<sup>89</sup> Or at least they attempted to defend against invasion.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

countries that were in power at that time: the United States and the Soviet Union. The inclusion of this phrase is an indicator of her British pride because she was right when she said that much had changed in the 50 years since the war. In that time, Britain had built and almost broken the welfare state. However, rather than acknowledging those problems, she used memories of the past to try to make Britain seem proud and powerful again. This shows that for her an appearance of strength was more important than actual stability, a pointedly different notion of war than the war for the cradle-to-grave welfare system that was fought on the ground in Britain during World War II.

Following her statements on the “might” of Britain, she turned a justification for the continued fighting in the Falklands. She quoted a question she was asked in Parliament about whether or not it would be better to stop fighting and just have peace because there was already so much bloodshed. In her answer, Thatcher again referenced the idea that Britain is a defender of the weak. She admitted that yes, it would in theory be better that there was less bloodshed, but she continued by saying she wished she had responded with, “Look, there is one thing in the world more important even than peace. It is liberty and justice and duty. And unless our forefathers had fought for those things, you...would not be able to question me in the House of commons today.”<sup>91</sup> Again she turns to the memory of when Britain had to fight for their right to be free<sup>92</sup> in order to justify her actions in the present. For her, to be British meant that it was important to act on the “duty” that Britain had to ensure freedom for others above all else in this moment. She refers to this duty as “heritage,” and maintains that British people must not forget that it is in their blood to defend others. her reference to heritage is particularly interesting because she does so by referencing Rudyard Kipling, a man who was not without his own racist

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Again, something that may or may not have actually happened.



tendencies.<sup>93</sup> Like Kipling, Thatcher thinks that she is fooling people when she is talking about how all of Britain has this heritage, when in reality it is only the Britain that she prefers that has this particular heritage. Both she and Kipling treat the black community as if they are separate from the rest of the population. While Kipling had some antiquated ideas about how black people had certain responsibilities and strengths because of their race, Thatcher did make any statements about them until she had to. Instead, as shown in her rhetoric about the “Falklands Man” that I will address later, she chose to pretend they did not exist.

The idea of heritage and the memory of old that Thatcher referred to in her entire speech really comes to a head at the end of the speech. She says,

We all three sat in the same Parliament as Winston Churchill. You were one of his ministers, you were in the same parliament because Winston didn't retire until 1964. We three sat in the same Parliament as Winston. Winston, with his tremendous long service, served...not only our Queen but Queen Victoria. Disraeli served Queen Victoria...What I am saying is that this is the way the thread of history runs...there have been certain things which have been unchanging throughout those years, and that is the undaunted spirit of the British people.<sup>94</sup>

Thatcher accomplishes her goal in this last statement. Though this speech was meant to be a celebration of two conservative men who had represented the Mid-Bedfordshire constituency for 50 years, it became a speech about how Thatcher was going to bring Britain back to the future, so to speak. She wanted both that the people would support her love for old British values and that people would associate her with the likes of Churchill and Disraeli because those were the men that she admired.

This passage is significant for our understanding of Thatcher's use of nostalgic rhetoric in several different ways. The first is that she refers to Churchill as “Winston.” This is something

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<sup>93</sup> See Rudyard Kipling's “The White Man's Burden” for an example of Kipling's views on race.

<sup>94</sup> Thatcher, “Speech to Mid-Bedfordshire Conservatives.”

that she did frequently, even though it is only recorded that they met once. She did this because she believed that there was a familiarity between her and Churchill. He was her hero, and she aspired to be like him in almost every way. Philip Abbott writes in his article “Leadership by Exemplar” that Thatcher idolized Churchill so much that the first thing she did when she moved into 10 Downing Street was to move a portrait of him from her room in the House of Commons to her new Prime Minister’s office.<sup>95</sup> Churchill was the great Conservative British war leader who led the country through some of its darkest times, which is exactly what Thatcher wanted to emulate in what she perceived to be a very similar moment.

Though it is ridiculous to say that the Falklands conflict was close in scale to World War II, Thatcher had very few opportunities to be directly compared to Churchill in behavior, so she eagerly took the Falklands as a moment to do so. In the same way that Churchill said that World War II was a battle between good and evil, freedom and fascism, Thatcher said in her speeches that Britain had to free the Falklands from Argentina’s challenge to the Western way of living. Abbott argues that Thatcher perfectly captured the Churchillian aura when she announced that the next generations of youths would write the next “chapter in the history of liberty” after playing the song “Rule Britannia.”<sup>96</sup> Churchill created such a standard of morality in which people were so happy to be living with the fruits of their freedom that they were outraged at the idea that anyone elsewhere could be living without such freedoms.<sup>97</sup> Thatcher used this exact line of reasoning to convince people that the Falklands were worth fighting for; if being British meant enjoying such freedoms bestowed upon you because you are British, and the people of the Falklands were in fact British, then the Falklanders having their freedoms infringed by the

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<sup>95</sup> Abbott, “Leading by Exemplar,” 193.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 197.

Argentinians was a disgrace. And even if you did not believe that the Falklanders were British citizens, then by Churchill's invoked standard, they deserved those freedoms anyway because all people do. The Churchill that Thatcher idealized was Britain's bulldog, so that was what being a Conservative woman meant in that moment. Rather than sensitizing the harshness and danger of the war, she had to bombard them with propaganda about British values until they too believed that they were doing the right thing. It was only after doing that that she could successfully lead her country into conflict.

The next name that she mentions briefly is Disraeli, another great Conservative leader from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Though it is not explicitly stated why Thatcher mentioned Disraeli, it is in all likelihood that Disraeli was also Prime Minister during a tumultuous time for the British Empire. In 1878, after fighting a diplomatic battle with the Russians over territory in Crimea, Disraeli managed to arrange peace in the Balkans, thus establishing him as one of the greatest British statesmen. Throughout his time in office, Disraeli worked to make Britain appear to be the strongest country in the world, which needed to expand due to its excessive strength. In one particular speech he said, "Britain has outgrown the continent of Europe...England is no longer a mere European Power; she is a metropolis of a great maritime empire, extending to the boundaries of the farthest oceans."<sup>98</sup> Thatcher most likely wanted to emulate the success he had in making the idea of Empire popular, the idea of Queen Victoria as Empress of India as well, in addition to his success as a statesman. The comparison between Thatcher and Disraeli becomes even more interesting when considering the fact that Disraeli was in a similar economic crisis as well when he was promoting the Empire. If Disraeli was able to make his legacy about the

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<sup>98</sup> Freda Harcourt, "Disraeli's Imperialism, 1866-1868: A Question of Timing," *The Historic Journal*, vol. 21, no. 1 (1980), 96.

success of the Empire rather than any other economic or social problems, then perhaps Thatcher could shape her legacy in the same way by tying his success to hers in public memory.

Thatcher's use of Queen Victoria's name here probably means less than one would assume. Though it could be that Thatcher wanted to evoke the idea of a powerful woman, it is more likely that she was using Victoria in the same way that Disraeli did: as an image of Empire. For Disraeli, giving Victoria a new title was a public relations move that Disraeli made the idea of Empire stronger. When one hears the word "empress," one thinks of more power and more control over vast lands than one would if they heard the word "queen." In the same way that Disraeli wanted people to think of unlimited British power when they heard the phrase "Empress Victoria," Thatcher wanted people to remember the former power of the Empire when she said the name Victoria in her speech.

Two weeks before the end of the war and one month after the victory in South Georgia, Thatcher used the same themes of nostalgia and the strength of empire in her speech to the Conservative Women's Conference on May 26. This was one of the most violent periods of the war; several ships had been brutally lost due to air strikes, and the public was feeling less than positively towards Thatcher and the war. Thatcher gave this speech to the Women's Conference as a way to describe and defend her actions. In doing so, she relied again on the idea that it was their duty as British people to defend the underdog. However, this time it wasn't just that it was their duty because they were British, but rather that it was their duty because the people that they were defending were also British.

Thatcher began the speech with a justification for why they had to use military force against Argentina. She explained to the women that they had tried a diplomatic solution through the US and through the UN, but that the Argentinians had rejected both attempts. Because of

this, they were left with no other choice but to attack. She says, “We in Britain know the reality of war. We know its hazards and its dangers. We know the task that faces our fighting men.”<sup>99</sup> The fact that she says “fighting men” rather than “soldiers” shows her engrained perception of gender roles. She knows that the women know the reality of war because they are the ones that are left at home to deal with the repercussions. Women are the ones that have to take care of the men after they come home from war, and therefore they have the true insights as to how war affects the home-front.<sup>100</sup> It relies on Thatcher, therefore, to tell the women left at home how the men are fairing in the battles, which is what she goes on to do.

After describing the war to the women, Thatcher begins to describe why the Falklanders need to be defended. She says that the Falklanders are British and that they want to be British. According to Thatcher, when the soldiers arrived on the islands at the beginning of the invasion the Falklanders said to them, “We were expecting you. We wondered why you didn’t get here sooner.” To which Thatcher responded, “That is entirely characteristic of British people wherever they may be.”<sup>101</sup> Though it seems like a stretch that people living on an island 8000 miles away that have never been in contact with a British person might have the same characteristics of British people, Thatcher runs with this idea. She quotes the New Zealand Prime Minister who said that the Falklanders were like family and that is why they have to be defended.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Margaret Thatcher, “Speech to Conservative Women’s Conference” (speech, London, May 25, 1982), Margaret Thatcher Foundation, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104948>.

<sup>100</sup> This perhaps goes against the idealized notion of World War I in which women were not always kind to men that they saw were home from war. In some instances, women would try to guilt men into enlisting for the war, despite their lack of knowledge as to why they were not fighting. This included instances when men were sent home due to injuries.

<sup>101</sup> Thatcher, “Speech to Conservative Women’s Conference.”

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

To Thatcher, the idea that the Falklanders were family went beyond the fact that they were part of the British Empire. Indeed, the idea that they were ever part of the Empire had been called into question due to the fact that there were only 1800 Falklanders, and they lived on an island 8000 miles away and never had any interaction with British people.<sup>103</sup> It had more to do with the type of life that they led. The lifestyle of someone living in the Falklands was agrarian. They did not have much business because there was no need with such a small population. They were the type of people who had only what they needed and kept their lives very simple. It was a very homogeneous community, which was exactly the type of community that Thatcher liked best. By saying that the Falklanders were British because they embodied British values, Thatcher was promoting an idea of Britishness that was almost entirely different than the Britishness of the actual modern British people. Unlike the lifestyle of an average British person, the Falkland lifestyle was majority white and stemmed from a time without the modern class system. Thatcher preferred this type of life because it both adhered to the Victorian values that she preferred, while also eliminating the types of problem that she was facing from the more diverse communities of England. The more that Thatcher could pretend that England was just like the Falklands, the more she could ignore the social problems that were facing her at home.

The question remains of why Thatcher thought it was necessary to explain the importance of the Falklands Man to the *Women's* Conservative group as opposed to Conservatives or the public in general. Thatcher said in her speech that women were the ones that knew the horrors of war because they were the ones that had to live in aftermath at home. She maintained that it was a woman's responsibility to take care of the country and keep it up and running while the men

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<sup>103</sup> There were only ever a couple of trading stations set up on the island. Rather than having a strict imperial rule like India or South Africa, the Falklanders were only nominally under British rule. This slight British rule was part of why there was so much confusion about who actually had control of the island between Britain and Argentina.

were away fighting their manly ways. This is the type of woman that Thatcher herself would have striven to be had she not been Prime Minister. But she was Prime Minister, and therefore she could not simply be that idealized woman. Instead, she had to act as a bridge between that ideal woman and a manlier type figure because she was in power. In her capacity as Prime Minister, Thatcher was a strong figure that stood her ground and defended her country, acting more as a man than as a woman. Because she was able to embody that kind of manly figure,<sup>104</sup> she was more able help women understand what was going on in the war in terms that they could grapple with. By becoming that bridge between the genders, Thatcher created a category of gender roles that was entirely unique from the ones that she promoted.

Thatcher's need to bridge the gap between the two genders shifted the definition of what it meant to be a Conservative woman from being sensitive and understanding of the needs of the people to being stable and understanding of the needs of the Empire. Rather than having to focus on the way that she sounded when she spoke, Thatcher had to worry about the message that was coming across to the people. In needing to convince the people that war was necessary for maintaining Britain's reputation of power across the world, Thatcher had to become more than just a relatable woman, she had to be an icon. To achieve this, she went back to the last great Conservative leader: Winston Churchill. By emulating the way that he spoke and the ideas of greatness and duty that he used, Thatcher changed Conservatism from what it had been in the first two years of her time in office to what it had been during World War II. In this particular moment of her time in power, it did not matter that Thatcher was a woman because her identity had to be bigger than her gender. It was not enough that she could relate to women because she was one or men because she was leading a war, she had to become a figure that people believed

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<sup>104</sup> Not to be confused with the black or immigrant man that she fought against in the previous chapter.

represented British strength. This is truly what it meant to be the Iron Lady. From the moment of victory onward, Thatcher was someone that the public believed truly had the strength of will and experience to lead the country.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Urban Development Corporations: Thatcher's Battle Against the Welfare State Continued**

“Mrs. Thatcher found Britain’s glass half empty; she has emptied it, and it is now half full.”-  
Will Hutton<sup>105</sup>

In June 1983, Mrs. Thatcher was standing on the precipice of victory in the Falklands and looking out onto another successful election cycle. With the war having given her and her Conservative party the push that they needed to get back into the public’s good graces, Thatcher was now powerful and confident enough to complete the policy agenda that she had laid out in 1979. This agenda included rolling back welfare, saving the economy from the troubles of inflation and debt, and lowering the rate of crime in the inner cities. As Hutton implies in his quote, Thatcher found Britain in a dismal state when she first took office in May of 1979. The work she did within the first two years, be it intentional or unintentional, worked to bring Britain to a state of absolute zero. Before the conflict in the Falklands, Thatcher was looking at a country that had 3 million people unemployed, rioters and racial tensions in the streets, and an economy that was still falling fast. The war, however, pushed all of those issues to the side and brought the country together briefly to defend its pride. But now in 1984, its pride having been defended, the country was left with all of the same problems it had before the war. The government was still in debt, crime was still a problem, and racial tensions were present in the inner city.

Through privatization and crime legislation, Thatcher was able to impose her own Conservative view on Britain in such a way that would not have been possible in the early years of her time in office. Once Thatcher won the Falklands War, she had enough political clout and

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<sup>105</sup> Will Hutton, “Thatcher’s Half- Revolution,” *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-), vol. 11, no. 4 (1987), 134.

confidence to form laws in such a way that they represented a neoliberal way of governing. Privatization allowed her to shrink the size of the government and sell her union problems to private corporations, which in turn allowed her to focus on the problem of the inner cities and their inhabitants. Clearly, when it came to conforming Britain into one that matched her Conservative way of living, Thatcher's gender did not really matter. This could perhaps be because she had already proven that she could be competent in spite of her gender during the war. Once she had shown the country that she could successfully lead them through war, a distinctly masculine endeavor, so far as wars tend to be construed, she convinced the public that she could do the masculine job of leading the country just as well as anyone else even if she was a woman. Thatcher's own gender was never a factor when she was conceiving her new laws, and therefore she did not make it an issue when it came to passing them. Taking the period of 1984-1987 as its focus, this chapter will examine the how Thatcher used a militant Conservative policy agenda, more particularly privatization and race and crime related laws, to solve the perceived social problems, and explore how she was able to impose her own Conservative vision on the country in doing so.

Between 1984 and 1987, Thatcher went so far as to create communities made up of white, middle-class people that embodied the neoliberal values that drove her politics. She did this by establishing several different types of community outreach programs that in reality did less community outreach and more community replacement. Perhaps the most pervasive of these programs was the establishment of Urban Development Corporations (UDC). UDCs were statutory planning corporations that had the power to override the decisions of local governments designed to bring private companies into inner city areas. The point of UDCs was to allow for faster planning and to cut through government red tape so that more corporations could be built

more quickly than they could if the corporations had to go through the local governments. While on face it may look like the UDCS could possibly be a positive force for bringing more jobs to underprivileged areas, in fact they did the opposite. UDCs would build up areas like docks abandoned warehouses and fill them with nice apartments and super stores. Then the jobs would be filled by middle class people brought in from other areas rather than by people who lived in the area. Therefore, rather than actually helping the areas in which they were located, the UDCs crowded the streets with “yuppies” from other places and increased racial tensions and tensions stemming from unemployment.<sup>106</sup>

The UDCs and other such programs had another more sinister, or clever, depending on your political affiliation, effect. By giving the new corporations the power to bypass local governments, the Conservative government undercut the power of the Labour party, who held the majority of the local council seats in these areas. After the Conservatives gained more power in this way, they went a step further by replacing the Labour voting blocs with Conservative ones. All of the gentrification in these areas meant that people who would usually align themselves with the Conservative party, middle-class white collar workers, started moving in and shifting the vote in the area from Labour to Conservative.<sup>107</sup> Thus in establishing these community outreach programs that were supposed to be improving the quality of life for the communities in which they were located, Thatcher was actually creating communities of people that were more representative of her own values. Diabolical though this method may have been, it was quite successful in giving the Conservatives more seats in the 1987 election.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Michael Jacobs, “Margaret Thatcher and the Inner Cities,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 23, no. 38 (1988), 1943.

<sup>107</sup> Jacobs, “Inner Cities,” 1944.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

The rest of Thatcher's decade in power was filled with a similarly militant need to impose Conservative values in all walks of life. This included reshaping the economy and the union power structure through privatization and reforming crime laws so that they further restricted the problem populations identified in Chapter 2. For Thatcher, the concept of privatization represented more than just a way to save the government's pocketbook, it as a way to reverse the effects of the socialist regime that she believed had been ruling over the country since World War II.

In order to best understand why privatization represented the epitome of Thatcher's Conservative beliefs, one must understand why the practice became necessary and the neo-liberal values that paved the way for its use in the early 1980s. Thatcher used a different set of neoliberal guidelines in this period of her administration than she did in her first time. Rather than focusing on making the public self-sufficient, Thatcher centered her second term around limiting the government's intervention in the markets.

The seeds of nationalization, the opposite of privatization, were sown in the early days of the Great War when the government began to seize control of several war related industries. Perhaps as a by-product of the urgent need for the products of said industries, the government ran the businesses incredibly efficiently. In fact, the government's management was so efficient that the public called for greater nationalization of other private industries.<sup>109</sup> In the same moment as this public demand for more nationalized industries, the Labour party was starting to form a more socialist platform. In 1918, the Labour party stated in their constitution that they were committed to the idea of common ownership of the production and distribution of goods, a clearly socialist value. However, rather than the the socialist/communist meaning of the idea of

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<sup>109</sup> Alan N. Miller, "Ideological Motivations of Privatization in Great Britain Versus Developing Countries," *Journal of International Affairs* 50, no. 2 (1997), 395.

common ownership, in which the people all have an equal share in a company, the Labour party meant that the people would be represented through government ownership of a business, thus complying with the already formed idea of nationalization. The Labour party of the Great War era believed that nationalization would bring the country one step closer to socialism, which was their goal at the time.<sup>110</sup> At this time, people that supported the idea of nationalization believed that the government would have to work harder to run these businesses efficiently so that they could maintain the support of the people. Another common belief at the time was that nationalization would make the distribution of wealth in the country more equal as individual people or corporations could not have a monopoly on any given utility or product. Between 1920 and 1945, the government nationalized several major British industries, including the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) and the Central Electricity Board between 1920 and 1930, and the Bank of England under the 1946 Nationalization Act.<sup>111</sup>

Thirty or so years went by before the system of nationalization began to crumble. Despite some people's first belief that nationalized systems would run more efficiently than private systems because of the government's need for public support, the nationalized industries were in reality much more inefficient than people would have liked. For example, some people had to wait two years just to get a telephone installed in their homes through British Telecom.<sup>112</sup> This apparent lack of efficiency arose because rather than the companies needing public support to survive, they just needed their products to remain a necessary part of daily life. In so far as every British person had a need for some sort of telecommunication, the government would have a reason to keep that company alive, regardless of whether or not it was turning a profit. Because

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Miller, 396.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 397.

of this, the management of the actual industries did not need to be particularly efficient because they knew that there was no chance of getting shut down. Furthermore, the government's focus was necessarily more attuned toward social and political problems, so they were not paying enough attention to these companies to see that they were costing them more money than they were worth.<sup>113</sup>

Nationalization would have been a nightmare situation for Thatcher. Not only was it an unnecessary area of government control, Conservatives believed, but it was also creating an atmosphere of laziness that Thatcher would have seen as entirely un-British given her neoliberal beliefs. Along with the belief that financial incentive was the best way to motivate society, another core liberal belief was that the government should have limited intervention in the free market. Thatcher took hold of these ideas, thus making them neoliberal, and used them to form her agenda for privatization. While Thatcher's actions in accordance with the first tenet of neoliberalism are fairly obvious given her steps towards dismantling the welfare system,<sup>114</sup> her adherence to the guidelines for the free market is more relevant to this period of time.

The Classical Liberals would have wanted Thatcher to shrink the government in such a way that it would have allowed the markets more freedom to act without regulation, so that was what she did. By selling large portions of the public sector to private citizens, Thatcher was able to align the economy to her Conservative values in several ways. The first was that it limited the government's control over industrial industries, a place, Conservatives may have argued, that they did not need to be in the first place. A further benefit of leaving the management of these industries in private hands was that it increased competition within the industry. When the government was running the entire business, they did not have to try to make their products good

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Please refer to chapter two for greater detail.

because they were the only ones producing them. Once the industries went into private hands, however, disparate companies had to compete to create products that people would want to buy or invest in, thus making the prices and products more attractive for the public and creating competition within the markets.<sup>115</sup> Thus by establishing more competition, Thatcher was forcing private companies to fend for themselves and create their own wealth, a concept that distinctly resembled Thatcher's own Conservative mindset.

Another benefit that came from privatization was the weakening of the trade union's bargaining power. This happened in two steps. The first step was a change to the laws that allowed the unions to have an immense amount of power in the first place. Parliament passed a measure in 1982 that restricted the unions' immunity to punishment for strikes only to situations in which they had a dispute with the member's own employers, and that dispute could only concern wages and work conditions.<sup>116</sup> Another measure passed in 1984 that further restricted the union's abilities, now saying that they could only strike if it was supported by a majority of the workforce voting with a secret ballot.<sup>117</sup>

The power of the unions reached its peak in the spring of 1984 when leader of the National Union of Mineworkers, Arthur Scargill, called for a massive strike of 180,000 workers. This strike had two major problems. The first was that it happened in spring, which was not the height of coal mining season. This immediately made the strike less effective than it would have been had it started in winter when people needed the coal to keep warm. The second problem was that he started the strike without the majority support of the workers, meaning that he had fractured his support base before he had even started. Thus a strike that should have been

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<sup>115</sup> Miller, 399.

<sup>116</sup> Kent Matthews, Patrick Minford, Stephen Nickell, and Elhanan Helpman, "Mrs Thatcher's Economic Policies 1979-1987," *Economic Policy* 2, no. 5 (1987), 65.

<sup>117</sup> Matthew, "Economic Policies," 66.

powerful and effective only lasted only twelve months and Scargill fell from power. The failure of this strike had two lasting effects on the relationship between workers and management. The first was that workers were now more tentative about striking without a ballot, and the second was that management now felt that they could change their practices without union retaliation.<sup>118</sup> Now that the unions had less power to bargain with, it was time to put the second part of the plan to weaken their power into place. When Thatcher began privatizing industries, she also began to sell off the sources of the unions' employment. Now that the unions were no longer a part of the public sector, the government was less on the hook for having to negotiate with them.

Over the course of three years, Thatcher solved two major problems: the debt of the government and the fight with the unions. When compared to what the country looked like when she took office in 1979, the Britain of 1984 was significantly more Conservative and controlled.

With the economy and the unions taken care of, Thatcher's final step towards making Britain resemble Thatcher's Conservative dream was to further restrict crime in the inner cities. This was done through two different but interrelated methods. The first was through laws similar to the ones described earlier in this thesis that gave the police more discretionary power. The second method was through intentional gentrification of some of the problem areas. These two methods worked together to both change the population of the bad areas into ones that were more docile and acceptable to the government (read: white and Conservative) and to stop the populations that were left unchanged before they could start a riot.

Following the passage of the Criminal Attempts Act in 1981, which changed some of the SUS law restrictions, the government went further with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act of 1986. This Act allows for the police to stop cars that they believe could be in the process of

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<sup>118</sup> Hutton, "Half-Revolution," 129.



being used for some sort of heist or crime, as well as stop cars that they believe may be carrying some sort of illegal weaponry. The Act also allows the police to set up road blocks in places where they believe there is a trend of crime.<sup>119</sup> As one may imagine, the passage of this Act was met with some skepticism because some people believed that it was passed as a further way to control the immigrant populations that the government thought was the source of the crime, despite the fact that there were studies that proved otherwise. The government did not take much heed of the skepticism, however, and instead went ahead with the Act. Some believed that the allowances made in the Act was some sort of post-riot strategy for the police.<sup>120</sup>

This act, in combination with the Public Order Act of 1986, made Thatcher's views on the sources of crime and the ways to stop crime absolutely clear. The Public Order Act of 1986 set out several limitations of the public's right and ability to assemble to protest in public. This law came on the heels of the 1985 riot in Birmingham, which was similar in violence and structure to the riots of 1981. This riot was particularly notable because before the riot the police and the local community had been cooperating peacefully with each other. Despite this cooperation, however there was a high amount of violent crimes in the area. The riot was started by a dispute over a parking ticket and ended with several Asian and black West Indian run stores being broken into by some local youths.<sup>121</sup> Case law already allowed police to restrict riots and public assemblies that turned violent with basically whatever force necessary, but this new law gave police almost unlimited discretionary power in the case of public riots. The Public Order Act allowed the police to stop gatherings *before* they happened if they believed that the gathering may turn violent or get too rowdy. This Act showed two very important aspects of

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<sup>119</sup> Terrill, "Law and Order," 443.

<sup>120</sup> Terrill, 448.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 449-50.

Thatcher's Conservative beliefs: first that she believed that individual rights were more important than collective rights, and second that Thatcher had almost unwavering support of the police.<sup>122</sup>

Thatcher's support of the police explains in part why she supported the intentional gentrification of some of the problem areas around London. By refusing to see the real cause of the problem, police discretion and a lack of understanding of immigrant and racially diverse communities, and giving the police *carte blanche* to stop crime by whatever means necessary, Thatcher had affectively solved the crime problem to such an extent that she could be happy of it. Her solution, however, was to limit the movements of immigrant and racial communities so much so that she did not really have to think about them.

Pushing parts of society that she would rather not think about off to the side is the embodiment of the way that Thatcher ran her entire administration. When groups of people or government systems did not fit into her neoliberal vision of Britain, Thatcher would find a way to marginalize them to the point that they stopped having any agency. Thatcher was not sensitive towards the plight of the lower classes, nor did she act on any maternal feeling to give benefits to those in need. When it came to issues of the economy and social structure, Thatcher relied on her ability to embody maleness, rather than her biologically natural femininity. For Thatcher, her strongest characteristic was the fact that she was headstrong and militant in her beliefs. She delivered her speeches and her opinions in a manly way, and after several years in office that was probably the way that people perceived them. If, for her, the only issue on the table was whether or not something was Conservative enough, and she was shaping the nation in such a way that her Conservatism was the only thing that mattered, then her gender was a non-issue. Through the

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 451.

last five years of Thatcher's tenure, the only thing that called attention to her gender was her nickname, but even then, it would have been more accurate in the sense that she was made of iron rather than that she was a lady, in the gendered sense of the word.

## Conclusion

When I started the process of writing this thesis I knew very little about Margaret Thatcher. From what I had heard about her from pop culture and various lessons in class, she seemed universally hated. Perhaps it was because of the generational divide between myself and those who had actually lived while she was in power, or the continental divide between myself and the United Kingdom, but I found myself with a healthy amount of what all aspiring historians need to create a well-rounded research project: objectivity. As I started my research and learned what exactly she did to make herself memorable, I was unencumbered by the general feeling of dislike that she left behind when she resigned in 1990. Because of this, I have been able to study Mrs. Thatcher and Thatcherism without being personally bothered by its unfortunate aftermath.

Yet, while this objectivity has been beneficial to my analysis of the importance of her gender and her place in the history of Conservatism, it has almost been a hindrance to my understanding of her legacy. When I came across instances of her racism or lack of compassion for those less fortunate in research for this thesis, I noted the facts with the goal of understanding why she made certain decisions and not how those decisions personally and emotionally impacted the public. But now that I am faced with the job of understanding her legacy and therefore understanding why she has ended up as one of the most hated figures in recent British history, I find that the objectivity that was once so helpful is necessarily slipping away. In studying the aftermath of the Thatcher decade and the transformations of society that occurred, I have found that it is impossible not agree with the general consensus at least a little. This is because despite her best efforts to return Britain to its previous glory, Thatcher made her time in office devastating to all those that were not already middle class. Thus, this thesis will conclude

with the necessary discussion of how Thatcher's new Conservatism transformed society into one which willfully ignored the "underclass," as they would come to be called, and how Thatcher's ultimate transcendence of her gender made gender matter more in elections to come.

When Thatcher started privatizing Britain's public industries, she did more than just settle the government's debts; she deepened the divide between social classes. Privatization was the process of selling whole industries to private citizens or corporations, creating competition by destroying the government's monopolies on various products. While privatization was a net good for the government, it could be argued that it was the opposite for society. Privatization allowed for the wealthy sector of society to grow more wealthy, because they were now able to have a hand in these privatized business, and caused the poorer members of society to become even more poor. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, privatized companies were often more efficient than their government counterparts, and part of that efficiency came from massive lay offs.<sup>123</sup> While the rising unemployment rate was a problem that Thatcher ignored when she was trying to stabilize inflation, it did not just go away after she had succeeded in her economic goals. Instead, the unemployment problem persisted well into the next administration. To fix the problem, Prime Minister John Major, a Conservative MP who replaced Thatcher after she resigned, set out to reverse one of Thatcher's major economic feats by returned the economy to a Keynesian market structure.<sup>124</sup> Major, and much of the Conservative party by this point, disagreed with Thatcher's prioritization of market stability over social stability.<sup>125</sup> The return to Keynesian principles meant that the government had a budget that now allowed for deficits to cover the growing need for job security and benefits in Britain. Though this attempt by the

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<sup>123</sup> William Megginson, "Privatization," *Foreign Policy*, no. 118 (2000), 23.

<sup>124</sup> G.K. Shaw, "Fiscal Policy: The Third Thatcher Administration 1987-1990 and the Thatcher Legacy 1990-1993," *FinanzArchiv/ Public Finance Analysis* 51, no. 1 (1994), 87.

<sup>125</sup> Rodney Brazier, "The Downfall of Margaret Thatcher," *The Modern Law Review* 54, no. 4 (1991), 475.

government to stem the problem of unemployment was made in good intentions, the damage was already done. Not only had the Thatcher decade forced more than 2 million more people into unemployment than there had been in 1979, but it had also changed the way that people looked at them.

In the article “Shameless? Picturing the “underclass” after Thatcherism,” Heather Nunn and Anita Biressi discuss how the new underclass was conceived during the Thatcher years and fortified in the years that came after. They argue that the underclass was born out of a break from the working class that occurred after privatization. Privatization, they argue, split the working class into those who could benefit from buying into the newly privatized businesses and those who could not. Those who could not buy into the new system became the new underclass, while those who could rose to the middle class.<sup>126</sup> The working class, they go on to argue, was then filled by immigrants, who took jobs that no one else wanted.<sup>127</sup> This new class system, then, was the legacy that Thatcher’s value system left on Britain. Throughout her time in office, Thatcher made it clear how she felt about those who could not support themselves. Whether it was through her slashing of the welfare system or her inflammatory comments against the rioters in 1981, Thatcher showed the public that they would have to conform to her values if they wanted to survive in her Britain. And at some point, though it is still unclear when, the public began to agree with her, or at least seem like they did. The new class system that came out of Thatcher’s economic ministrations left behind the working and not working poor, and in time the public began to see those people as nuisances. And, after some time, the public opinion of the underclass went further than just surface annoyance. Nunn and Biressi argue that the public

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<sup>126</sup> Heather Nunn and Anita Biressi, “Shameless? Picturing the “underclass” after Thatcherism,” in *Thatcher and After: Margaret Thatcher and Her Afterlife in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Louisa Hadley and Elizabeth Ho (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 138.

<sup>127</sup> Nunn and Biressi, “Shameless?” 139.

began to believe that people were poor as a choice, a notion that was not far off from Thatcher's Conservative beliefs.<sup>128</sup>

The seeds of distaste and condescension toward the underclass that Thatcher had planted when commended the police on their service during the riots in 1981 rather than address the problems of unemployment and gentrification had thus grown into something much worse by the 1990s and early 2000s. At best, the underclass was ignored as Thatcher had wanted. At worst, reality and lifestyle television shows exacerbated the public's already negative perception of the underclass.

Reality shows, though commonplace now, were new in the late 1990s, and came about around the same time that the underclass was solidifying as a new part of the social hierarchy. Though harmless on the surface, self-improvement reality television shows become more harmful their messages are analyzed. Self-improvement shows show the general public that normal people can make their lives infinitely better by simply changing the way that they dress or working out more. The point of these shows is to make things that people would normally have to work incredibly hard for look easy. This neoliberal message, combined with a society that already believed that their poorest members were poor intentionally, is extremely pernicious.<sup>129</sup> Adding to the harmful nature of the life-style shows was the rise in popularity of crime solving shows, which frequently portrayed perpetrators as drunks, drug addicts, prostitutes, and other iterations of the poorest members of society. Showing suspects in such a way on these shows sensationalized a belief that society already had: that the underclass was rife with criminals.<sup>130</sup> Entertaining though these shows may be, they really serve as to amplify of one

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 141-2.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

of Thatcher's least charming beliefs: that people who cannot raise themselves in society are shameful and deserve to be looked at as such. In understanding this particular aspect of Thatcher's legacy, one begins to understand why people remember her in such a negative way.

Thatcher's legacy as the first female Prime Minister is no less complicated than her legacy with regards to the economy and social class. As I have shown throughout this thesis, Thatcher's gender mattered less and less over the course of her time in power. It mattered when it came to selling her as a candidate in 1979 because it was hard for the public to immediately accept such a strange woman as the leader of the country. Not only did Thatcher need to be sensitized so that her extreme views could be more easily accepted, but she also needed to appear as more feminine so that she could be more relatable. This necessity of being relatable however, did not last long after she was elected. When it came to her economic and social plans, Thatcher's gender did not matter at all. Even she clearly expressed her femininity in the way that she appeared in public, with her hair always perfect and suit always matching, Thatcher's record as Prime Minister on paper gives no indication of her gender.

While in office, Thatcher did not do anything particularly helpful for women other than become Prime Minister. But that's just the thing; Thatcher was not the the first female Prime Minister because the country wanted a woman as a leader, she became the first female Prime Minister because she was a powerful politician that happened to be a woman. As we saw in Chapter 3, when Thatcher needed to relate to women, she was able to do so, and when she needed to inspire men to follow her she was able to do that as well. Thatcher's ability to cross this gender gap meant that it did not matter which gender she belonged to, for she was able to employ stereotypically male characteristics just as well as stereotypically female ones. It was



only after Thatcher was already long gone from 10 Downing Street that the fact of her gender started to become most important to her legacy.

Thatcher's gender matters now because we as a society say it does. And even now, there exists a separation between the idea of Thatcher as Prime Minister and the idea of Thatcher as a woman. When people think of Thatcher, the first thing they think about is how horrible she was. But that horribleness does not stem from her gender, it stems from her economic and social politics and the impacts that they had on society. It is only after people acknowledge this aspect of her time in office that they add something about her gender. Derogatory statements have certainly been used about her, but in my experience with telling people the subject of this thesis, they very rarely come first. Comments about her gender are added as an afterthought because social norms dictate that a comment has to be made.

Why, then, does gender matter so much now when America is faced with the possibility of its first female President? Hillary Clinton has been attacked for having many of the same qualities as Thatcher: a forced tone of voice, an inability to relate to the public, and a militant attitude towards certain subjects. However, whereas Thatcher was able to overcome these setbacks, they at times seem almost insurmountable for Clinton. Even though Clinton is as experienced and formidable a candidate in this race as any of the men,<sup>131</sup> the public gets seemingly caught up in the way that she presents herself. For instance, if she says something intelligent in a "shrill" tone of voice, the content of her speech does not matter, only the fact that she came off as a bitch.<sup>132</sup> We judge Clinton in the aforementioned way because she is not succeeding as a stereotypical woman. Instead, she at times transcends gender like Thatcher, and

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<sup>131</sup> Even more so than some of the men.

<sup>132</sup> This word, though inappropriate, is important to include due to its gendered nature.

that bothers people. In our race to achieve gender equality, we have made stereotypical gender matter more.

Therein lies the confusion in Thatcher's legacy.

Though Thatcher theoretically proved that a woman could run a country, her transcendence of gender also proved that gender did not matter. When people strive for gender equality, they want to prove that a woman can do a job just as well as man. Regardless of one's political affiliation, one cannot say that Thatcher did not successfully run at least some aspects of the country, for Britain did not fall apart into complete shambles under her leadership. Just as any man could have made the same decisions that she did and been just hated for them, Thatcher thus lead the country both better and worse than any man that came before her. That is the true accomplishment of the Thatcher decade. Thatcher, as a woman, even a woman who did not pay attention to her own gender, did the same job that a man had done before, and then proved that it did not matter that she was a woman while doing it. In this, she truly proved that women can do the same job as men with equal success and failure. That is true equality, and a positive legacy that should not get lost in all the negative.

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