

**Personal Choice Paper:
A Brief History of the World, 1995-2005 From My Own Perspective
HIS135
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This paper on the history of the world is written from my viewpoint as a young man growing up in the United Kingdom. During the 1990s, the internet was still an unknown entity for a large of the United Kingdom. Access was limited to the large universities or military bases. This meant that for a large part of the nineties, world news was broadcast on the television or radio stations at the top of the hour. As a result most of the memorable moments in my history in the 1990s were informed by national and local events that affected me closer to home. It was not until the growth of globalization and the invention of the World Wide Web that my perspective widened. This is a chronological documentation of some of the moments in history as seen from my own view.

In 1995, the most memorable event for many people in Britain was the coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial. This was the first time that live coverage of a court trial had been aired on television and was notable for the person on trial. A well-known sportsman and actor, O.J. Simpson's trial gripped the U.S. and was closely followed in the United Kingdom as well. Highlights were broadcast on the hourly news reports and 24-hour programming was dedicated to the trial. Even in the United Kingdom, it was all many could talk about. It was one of the biggest trials of the decade and was made even bigger by the fact the trial was filmed. The trial saw O.J. Simpson be found not guilty and provoked divisive reaction around the world. (Dillon) His arrest and trial became infamous even after the verdict was delivered, infused into pop culture and fueling the growth of court television shows. Since then, the doors have been opened for other trials to be filmed and reality court shows, such as Judge Judy, have become popular television shows.



(Photo of O.J. Simpson pursued by police after being named prime suspect. Photo courtesy **Los Angeles Times**)

The following year, another story dominated the news reports. On March 13, 43-year-old Thomas Hamilton shot and killed 16 primary school children in Dunblane, Scotland. Hamilton also killed teacher Gwen Mayor and injured multiple others within the school before taking his own life. It was the worst massacre to occur in Britain in nearly a decade. (BBC News) The massacre resulted in many changes around the nation in efforts to prevent a similar event happening in the future. British Prime Minister John Major implemented a ban on sales of all handguns in England, Scotland, and Wales. Schools also took steps to protect the children in their care with many building new high fences around their perimeter and installing better security systems. The change in school security was almost immediate and, by the end of the year, secure door entry systems had become the norm in a majority of education institutes across the United Kingdom. (Abrams)

A great change in British culture was also happening in 1996. Britain was undergoing a renaissance of sorts at that time. London was back on the global stage in the fashion industry, as were other British cities like Glasgow and Manchester. Largely, the focus was due to the

emergence of British bands and new artists such as Damien Hirst. Since the start of the nineties, Britain's arts and cultural scene experienced a considerable growth.

Oasis and Blur were two of the most successful bands of the music scene from this time period. These two bands were notable not only for their success, but also for their considerable political influence and social views. Like many other bands in the British music charts, Oasis and Blur were vocal about their grievances and the damage the conservative government had done. The influence the two bands had on the opinions of the British youth cannot be emphasized enough. Young males between the age of 15 and 20 emulated the three singers in the bands, dressing like them and styling their hair the same. Although not quite as big as the Beatles had been, there were many comparisons made about the new leaders of Britpop and the Fab Four. The comparisons were made in particular between Oasis and the Beatles. These were welcomed by Noel and Liam Gallagher of Oasis, who both cited the Beatles as their primary influence. The effect this endorsement had on my contemporaries was significant. Suddenly, a new generation was discovering the Beatles for the first time.

In 1996, the friendly rivalry between Oasis and Blur reached its peak and both bands played headlining concerts that year showing how big they had become. Although Blur had sold the most records, it was the Oasis concerts at Knebworth that were to have the biggest impact on Britain that summer. On August 10 and August 11, Oasis played two outdoor concerts at the hallowed Knebworth House concert ground. More than 250,000 tickets were purchased within minutes of going on sale and became the biggest concert in recent history. Supported by other bands emerging from the Britpop scene, the concerts cemented Oasis' role in British music history. (Moran)

For British culture, Britpop was an essential movement. The cultural scene in the 1980s and early 1990s was bleak. This had an effect on the younger generations who felt that the optimism their parents felt growing up was gone. All around them were news stories of rising costs and fewer jobs. In the mid-90s, the emergence of British bands such as Oasis and Blur was exciting and new. A total antithesis to the manufactured pop sounds of the previous decade, Britpop returned the passion to music creating a connection with youth that hadn't been in the music of the 1980s. (Sturges)

By 1996, British culture had been given a new moniker by the press, Cool Britannia, and with the name came a renewed pride in the country. The year also saw a rise in the number of people playing musical instruments and a rise in the local music scene. The increase in teenagers and young adults learning music theory and playing in bands correlated with the rise of Britpop. The surge in music and instrument sales also boosted local economy and retail stores thrived from the influence of the new Britpop scene. The bands were anti-establishment, railing against the government and singing about the bleakness of Britain's future. (Sturges)

In 1997, all that would change when the Labour government won the general election. Tony Blair became the youngest Prime Minister in more than a century and the first Labour Prime Minister in two decades. Suddenly the government many of the bands had been railing against no longer existed. In the early part of his leadership, the singers from Oasis and Blur were invited to an afternoon lunch at Downing Street. The press considered this to be a strategic maneuver and only highlighted the influence these bands had on the young voters of the nation. However, Damon Albarn from Blur declined the offer, as did Liam Gallagher from Oasis. Only Noel Gallagher attended the function. The move caused an unexpected backlash as many Oasis fans considered Gallagher had "sold out." One of the most outspoken critics of the country's

ruling parties, it seemed to be a hypocritical by many who hung on his every word. Nevertheless, Tony Blair's Labour government continued to take pains to engage the young voters of Britain using the Cool Britannia as a reference to his new government. (Pitcher)

Also in 1997, Hong Kong was handed over to China by Britain. After 155 years of rule, the small island nation returned under China's control on July 1. Although there was a ceremony to celebrate the handover, it felt like the way of life for many Hong Kong citizens had been lost. Unlike mainland China, Hong Kong had thrived on economic success and had a capitalist approach to industry. China handled the integration with caution as they realized they needed to keep the economically wealthy nation on its side. The handover resonated at home with my neighbors who were immigrants from the New Territories in Hong Kong.

This transition signaled many changes to the infrastructure that many were uncomfortable with. The first change would be to the currency, the Chinese Yuan would have to be accepted meaning that two different prices on consumer good would have to be given. Other changes were thought to come in the future but no one really knew how much Hong Kong would be affected by the handover. (Eyewitness to the 20th Century 379) This left many citizens such as my neighbors with an uneasy, apprehensive feeling about the future of Hong Kong.

At the height of British summer, a tragedy occurred that put the entire nation in shock. On August 31, 1997, Diana, Princess of Wales was killed in a car accident in Paris. The story was on the front page of newspapers around the world for several days as speculation grew about what really happened. For many British people, this was the greatest national tragedy to have happened in recent years and, as a result, there was a visible outpouring of grief throughout the country. Kensington Palace gates were covered in bouquets and wreaths as hundreds of thousands visited London to pay their last respects to Diana. At the start, 1997 had begun with

the promise of new beginnings for the nation. A new Prime Minister was in power with fresh ideas for a younger generation and a rising pride within the nation's people. However, the death of the "people's princess" cast a pall over the nation and the year ended with significantly less fanfare than it started. (BBC News)

Although the nation was still in shock after the death of Diana, the spring of 1998 saw one of the most positive changes within Ireland. After more than three decades, the sectarian conflict between Catholic and Protestant communities, known as "the troubles," came to a conclusion. "The troubles" had been a bloody part of Northern Ireland's and Britain's history since 1968 and had resulted in the deaths of more than 3,000 people. Prime Minister Tony Blair, Ireland's leader Bertie Ahern, and political party leaders from eight other parties in Northern Ireland sat down to discuss peace agreements. After an almost unanimous vote for peace on May 22, an agreement was drawn up that included concessions for imprisoned terrorists and a two-year timeline for all militia to give up their weapons. (Eyewitness to the 20th Century 384) After decades of violence and violent acts of terrorism that often took place in Britain as well as Northern Ireland, a peaceful resolution known as the Good Friday Agreement was decided upon.

The end of the century was approaching and many major events had taken place, particularly within the final decade. A cultural revolution of sorts had taken place in Britain making it comparable to the "swinging Britain" of the sixties and spawning fresh new artists from all media into the mainstream. A new Prime Minister had given the nation optimism and hope, his greatest achievement so far being the end of "the troubles" in Northern Ireland. The final year, however, saw two of the most shocking crimes occur within 6 days of each other. (Eyewitness to the 20th Century 381)

The first event happened in the U.S. Two high school students named Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris walked into Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado armed with guns. Within less than an hour, they had committed the biggest mass murder in American history to date. Twenty-four hour news channels had recently begun to air and live reports were broadcast around the world as the horrifying events unfolded. (The Guardian)

The massacre at Columbine was compared to the tragedy at Dunblane and Britain's population including myself, empathized with those affected by the events. The event provoked a proposal for tougher gun laws in the United States and a demand for violence in the entertainment industry to be toned down. School security systems were investigated and in some cases, deemed to be inadequate. The U.S. Department of Education released a report indicating that in addition to tighter school security, efforts needed to be made to mitigate these kinds of situations arising. Bullying was considered to be one of the biggest triggers of violent outbreaks and schools were instructed to monitor the behavior of students more closely. (BBC News)

In the United Kingdom, the strict gun laws in place were now seen as very relevant and led everyone to believe gun crimes were the problems of other countries. Six days later however, Jill Dando a television presenter on BBC1's criminal investigation show Crimewatch, was shot and killed on her the doorstep of her home in broad daylight. Not only was the nature of the crime rarely heard of in Britain, it was incomprehensible that someone so well known could be murdered in daylight. No real motive was found and the loss of a beloved public figure reminded many of the previous year's loss of Diana. An investigation was conducted and resulted in the arrest of Barry George, a loner with a history of unsociable behavior. Although the evidence against George was slim, he was tried and sentenced to life in prison. Several years later, his

conviction was overturned due to discredited forensic evidence. George was freed and the murder of Jill Dando remains unsolved. (“UK BBC presenter shot dead.” BBC News)

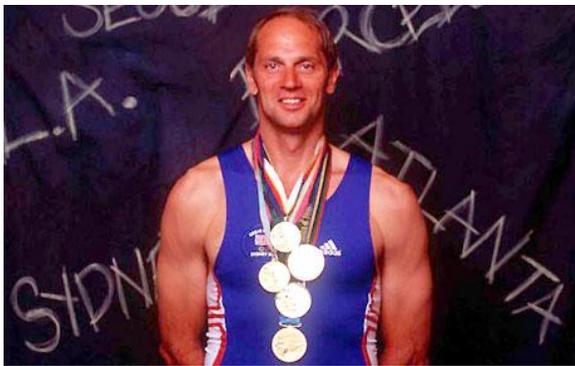
The new century began with aplomb. Within the first month of the year, Catherine Hartley and Fiona Thornewill became the first women to reach the South Pole. Simultaneously, Fiona Thornewill also became part of the first married couple to reach the South Pole as they were accompanied on the expedition by her husband Michael Thornewill. The three explorers battled against katabatic winds and extreme cold as they made the 977 mile journey to the Pole. The achievement garnered the trio places in the Pride of Britain awards for the year and imbued the country with a sense of optimism for the new millennium. (“2000: First British women to reach South Pole.” BBC News)

The growing optimism was again put to the test in May of the same year when the Ford Motor Company announced it would be closing its manufacturing plant in Dagenham, Essex by 2002. The plant, which had been in operation since 1929, had been an integral part of the local economy and the closing was expected to impact 3,000 jobs. Not only was the closure an economic blow to the community, it was also a psychological one. The Ford Motor Company manufacturing plant had been part of the town’s identity for more than 70 years and many felt the closure was akin to losing a portion of the community. (Arnot)

The closure of the Dagenham plant signaled the beginning of the end for manufacturing in the United Kingdom. Rising costs and lower sales volumes was blamed as the cause for many businesses closing operations in Britain. Another cause was globalization. As global communications improved and shipping times were reduced, many companies opted for new operations in countries such as China and India. In these countries, labor regulations were more relaxed and companies found overheads were much lower, improving their profit margins. As a

result, the majority of Britain's factories and manufacturing operations were shuttered permanently in the first few years of the new century.

In September of the same year, Britain's Olympic athletes flew to Sydney, Australia to compete in the Olympic Games. The U.S. dominated the majority of the events winning a total of 93 medals by the end. Britain placed tenth with an overall medal count of 28. This was a notable Olympic Games for Britain, however, as it marked a world record achievement by one fourth of its rowing team, Steven Redgrave. This was the fifth consecutive gold medal for Redgrave and the final Olympics he would compete in. By the end of his career, he had won a total of fourteen gold medals in Olympic Games and World Championships. So far, no one in the sport of rowing has surpassed this achievement. The year ended on a jubilant note for Steve Redgrave as he was awarded the BBC Sports Personality of the Year and was also part of the Royal New Year's Honors List for contributions to the sport of rowing. (Bagchi)



(Steve Redgrave after winning his 5th Olympic Gold. Photo courtesy **Telegraph Newspaper**)

The following September was marked by an altogether different event as terrorists hijacked four commercial planes on the morning of September 11, 2001. More than 2,500 people died, making it the largest mass murder on American soil. The first plane hit the North Tower at the World Trade Center in New York City 8:46 am local time. Initial reports in the United

Kingdom suggested a small private plane had accidentally flown into the tower. This was quickly corrected and radio stations across the country reported a commercial airliner had accidentally crashed into the tower. When the second airliner hit the South Tower at 9:03 am radio stations across Britain ceased broadcasting normal programs. BBC Radio One, the nation's leading music station changed its programming for the day and its morning radio program, the Chris Moyles Show stopped broadcasting music. The host stayed on air and punctuated the radio silence with intermittent updates on the unfolding events. (Nicholson) As in the U.S., all major airports in Europe were closed and all flights grounded. I was within the vicinity of Heathrow airport that day, en-route to my office. As I passed the runways of Heathrow, large numbers of planes were lined up as if in a parking lot where they sat empty until further notice.

After the tragedies of the third and fourth flights were reported, many offices across Europe's major cities ceased normal operations. The fear that more attacks could occur across the globe led many workers to leave early for the day and be with family. In the aftermath of the attacks, several countries took immediate actions in condemning the act. The terrorist organization al-Qaeda took responsibility for the act and, in response, many countries froze the accounts affiliated with the organization. New anti-terrorism laws were introduced in several countries across the United Nations and many nations offered their support to the United States. ("Chart: How 9/11 changed the law." Mother Jones)

Around the world, media organizations printed stories on al-Qaeda and their leader Osama Bin-Laden's hatred towards the West. Although the terrorist group had claimed responsibility for the crime, there were also a number of conspiracy theories surrounding the event and many tabloids created more of a furor by printing these theories. Mark Jacobson of *New York Magazine* wrote an article discussing the arguments of the most prominent conspiracy

theorists and the effect a national tragedy has on people. Like the Kennedy assassination and the Pearl Harbor attack, the tragedy of September 11 2001 continued to spawn new theories about what really happened years after the event. (Jacobsen)

Despite the horror of September 11, it was not conceivable to many that a similar attack would happen again. However, on July 7, 2005, Britain experienced a terror attack that drew comparisons to that fateful day. One day after Britain was announced as the host of the 2012 Olympic Games, multiple bombs were detonated on the London underground train system causing extensive damage. An additional bomb was detonated on a double decker bus in the Tavistock Square neighborhood in London. This explosion tore the roof off of the bus killing several passengers and injuring others. As a result of the attacks, all public transport operations in Central London were shut down as emergency services responded to the multiple incidents. The city itself was on a security lockdown and thousands of people made their way out of Central London by whatever means they could. Road closures meant it was impossible for taxi services to get through and as a result many people walked several miles to the nearest public transport. (The Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on July 7 2005, BBC News)

To cope with this emergency, buses and lifeboats were put into service to transport people across the river and out of the city. Advances in technology enabled reports on the incident to be disseminated almost in real time. Mobile technologies allowed witnesses to send photos of the destruction and chaos to news media. However, this also had an adverse effect as telecommunication networks became overloaded with traffic. British national cell phone provider Vodafone set up temporary routing allowing emergency service calls to take priority. (“London bombings toll rises to 37.” BBC News)



(Cell phone picture of people evacuating the train tunnels. Photo: Alexander Chadwick)

Economically, the event caused the British Pound to drop in value on the stock exchange. Although the world economy remained pretty stable, the Financial Times Stock Exchange index dropped substantially and the London Stock Exchange began taking emergency measures to prevent panic selling on the European markets. As a measure of preparedness after the event, the Bank of England implemented new contingency plans in case something like this happened again in the future.

The July 7 bombings were confirmed as the actions of groups working within the al-Qaeda network through postings on various websites linked with terrorism and a recorded message sent to British Parliament. (BBC) In 2006, the UK Home Office confirmed al-Qaeda was responsible for the attacks. Their investigation indicated that the attack was a response to the United Kingdom's engagement in war on Iraq and Afghanistan. Intelligence showed that two of the four people who carried out the attack had been to visit with groups operating out of Pakistan. Yet, prior to this attack none of the men had acted in a way to suggest they had been radicalized or associated with terror networks. For many British citizens, the implication that this was a reaction to the Iraq war confirmed what many had believed was the cause. The choice to go to war in Iraq was not a popular one among the general public. Prime Minister Tony Blair's

number of supporters had significantly decreased since the decision had been made and this report was another blow to his leadership. (Townsend)

The ten years between 1995 and 2005 saw several major events in history, ranging from triumphs to tragedies and numerous transitions in between. The United Kingdom transformed itself from an island nation noted for its mining and manufacturing industries to a cultural center for the arts. A young Prime Minister gave new hope to a struggling economy. On a global scale, things changed exponentially. The increasing use of the internet accelerated globalization and international trading became the norm. However, globalization had adverse effects as well. While consumers benefitted from the ability to obtain almost anything from around the world, companies looked for cheaper means of production and the process of outsourcing to cheaper locations began, devastating some local economies. The new global community also experienced horror as two major terror attacks occurred in the prominent cities of New York and London.

Despite these horrors, there were also great achievements and moments of unity. The conflict in Northern Ireland came to a peaceful resolution after more than three decades of violence. Nations around the world showed how a global community could work together in the aftermath of September 11. If the time between 1995 and 2005 showed me anything, it was that the world was on the brink of major changes yet to come. Most notably, the continued proliferation of the internet indicated a shifting world of business, education, and socialization. By 2005, it was clear that the changes I would see in my lifetime were only just beginning.

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