



A new Elizabethan age: The Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) and the nostalgic politics of Anglofuturism

Politics

1–21

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DOI: 10.1177/02633957251358327

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Abstract

Anglofuturism promises to deliver Britain from an age of crisis into one of hope, creativity, and technological revolution. This article uses the United Kingdom's 2023 creation of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) as a window into Anglofuturism's role in post-Brexit 'Global Britain'. Drawing on parliamentary debates and reports about ARIA's creation, it shows how forward-looking proposals for reinvigorating Britain's 'global science superpower' status were underwritten by nostalgias for 16th-century Elizabethan England and mid-20th-century America – 'modern' eras allegedly founded on the individual brilliance and heroic exploration of 'great men'. It challenges conventional understandings of nostalgia as simply melancholic and backward-looking, showing how the emotion also shapes political visions of a bright and hopeful future. However, the article also argues that forward-looking nostalgias can have a dark side. This becomes apparent when we locate Anglofuturism within broader far-right constellations interested in conventionally nostalgic, eugenicist methods of propelling the nation.

Keywords

empire, future studies, nostalgia, science, technology

Received: 21st January 2025; Revised version received: 26th June 2025; Accepted: 27th June 2025

'We are living through the nightmare edition of "Great Men Make History"'

Davis (2022)

Gendered and racialised stereotypes persistently focus national narratives on history's 'Great Men': 'acutely individualist' visionaries 'who came to shape, through willpower and intelligence, the destinies of Britain and, later, the world' (Gossedge, 2016: 137).

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As the 20th-century United Kingdom became increasingly interested in using science to counter perceived decline and recapture greatness, its great men of history were increasingly defined by their capacity for scientific and technological innovation. In recent years, these ideas were formalised in the ‘Global Britain’ strategy – the core policy domains considered central to post-Brexit success (Daddow, 2019). In 2023, the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) was created under the auspices of Global Britain to sponsor ‘high risk, high reward’ science research (UK Government, 2023b). Understanding ARIA’s establishment as an example of nostalgic ‘Anglofuturism’, this article illuminates the perils of pursuing greatness through science. At a time when the far-right is experiencing a far-reaching revival (Pegg et al., 2024; Saini, 2019), the article disrupts Anglofuturism’s progressive self-image, locating it within long-standing societal desires to reassert white racial dominance, reactivated by Brexit (Melhuish, 2024). With similar patterns evident in Donald Trump’s America, the article underlines how Anglofuturism’s ‘infatuation’ with heroic white men portends not only ‘Armageddon’ (Davis, 2022), but an everyday assault on the values and contemporary gains of truly progressive politics (Bolin, 2025).

Anglofuturism is a mental framework that combines mid-20th-century ‘New Elizabethan’ national narratives about the individual brilliance and heroic exploration of 16th-century great men (Morra, 2016) with an admiration for American modernity found in some advocacy of the post-imperial formation known as the Anglosphere (Kenny and Pearce, 2018). Contrary to prevailing assumptions about nostalgia’s purely retrospective gaze, Anglofuturism’s ‘revived industrial strategy’ engages a forward-looking nostalgia (Boym, 2001; Kenny, 2017) that is futuristic – imagining ‘electric airships [moving] freight across the country’ – while ‘[r]ooting our vision of the future in the best of our past’ (Roussinos, 2022). However, Anglofuturism also has a ‘dark side’ embedded in colonial legacies (cf. Bonotti et al., this issue). Extreme Anglofuturists emphasise the purported biological basis of greatness, dovetailing with the contemporary ‘return of race science’ (Saini, 2019). Rooted in colonial ways of categorising people, race science creates spurious biological hierarchies of humanity led by ‘whites’ deemed innately superior in mind and body to ‘others’. Pseudoscientific measures of intelligence are used as evidence of ‘natural’ racial differences, and fuel debates about a nation’s best methods for reproducing high-quality ‘genetic stock’ – a practice known as eugenics (Pegg et al., 2024). The Anglofuturist interest in harnessing a population’s innate talents for Britain’s (inter)national renewal sits within this broader trend. Similar ideas swirled around ARIA’s creation, whose institutional structure – its agenda dependent on the tastes of its managers and shielded from public scrutiny – left it precariously open to the possibility of promoting eugenics. In this light, Anglofuturism’s forward-looking nostalgia betrays undercurrents of bleaker forms of the emotion concerned with reasserting colonially rooted racial hierarchies in the name of national progress.

The article makes a dual contribution. Empirically, it provides the first academic study of Anglofuturism, mapping its relationship with New Elizabethan, Anglospherist, and eugenicist movements. It addresses a strand of Science and Technology Studies (STS), which has long argued that science is ‘essentially political’ (Brown, 2015: 9–11) but could go further in charting the scientific (re)production of racial and colonial power dynamics (Jasanoff, 2004: 35–36). Examining such relationships through the novel Anglofuturist case of ARIA, the article demonstrates how the pursuit and funding of science, and the creation of scientific institutions, are always ‘value-laden’, entailing political ‘questions of power, justice, morality and group identity’ (see Brown, 2015: 10).

Conceptually, the article adds to growing interest in complicating nostalgia by moving beyond presumptions that it embodies a negative, melancholic, and straightforward desire to return to the past (Benabdallah, 2021; Boym, 2001; Kenny, 2017; Melhuish, 2022). Instead, the article shows how nostalgia also shapes political visions of a bright future, associated with positive emotions like optimism and hope. However, by revealing the potential dark side of forward-looking nostalgia, the article also cautions against overcorrecting and assuming that this utopian vision is positive and hopeful for all (Bell, 2021).

The article uses a qualitative discourse analysis, conducted via a close reading of all official UK parliamentary debates, committee evidence sessions, and reports about ARIA's establishment, plus informal blogs and social media posts written by ARIA's architects and the broader Anglofuturist movement. Adopting an historicised and postcolonial approach to discourse analysis (Melhuish, 2022: 1762–1764), it uses secondary sources to explore how the British empire was invoked in mid-20th-century New Elizabethanism and then traces how similar themes threaded through the primary sources of contemporary Anglofuturism. Grounded in the insights of critical emotions research, which have demonstrated how the emotional foundations of political discourse are always present but often disguised, the article explores the variegated ways in which nostalgia is represented in these sources (see Melhuish, 2022: 1762–1764, 2024). Interdisciplinary literatures guide the interpretation of diluted, euphemistic, and temporally complex expressions of empire nostalgia (Boym, 2001; Lorcín, 2013), understood to be shaped by the pejorative contemporary meaning context surrounding empire (Saunders, 2020) and nostalgia itself (Kenny, 2017).

The article begins by discussing how nostalgia framed 1950s New Elizabethanism before showing how these ideas gained traction in the post-Brexit era. It then explores post-Brexit New Elizabethanism as a form of Anglofuturism associated with broader far-right constellations, maps ARIA's creation, and explores its embeddedness in colonially rooted, 'forward-looking' nostalgias. The article concludes by emphasising how the Anglofuturist mental frameworks that engendered ARIA's creation continue to animate Anglo-American political life, highlighting how the scientific pursuit of greatness mainstreams far-right race science.

Past futures: 20th-century new Elizabethanism

For 1950s 'New Elizabethans' there were clear and specific links between the new reign of Queen Elizabeth II and the 16th-century Elizabethan age, which suggested a continuous (Crossley, 2024: 15; Morra, 2016: 19; Wiebe, 2005: 147) and 'providential' national narrative (Stevens, 2016: 122). Crowned in their mid-twenties, both Elizabeths offered 'an image of youthful modernity' which denoted 'forward-looking' aims (Morra, 2016: 19). Seasonal metaphors describing a transition from a *winter* of wartime crisis into a victorious *spring* of national renewal reinforced Elizabethan parallels of optimism, youth, and future-orientation (Wiebe, 2005: 152). Both Elizabeths also symbolised 'traditional, feminine duty [which] would enable and inspire the exploits of great men' (Morra, 2016: 19). While Elizabeth I had presided over the defeat of the Spanish Armada, Elizabeth II would reign over a nation which had defeated Nazi Germany (Morra, 2016: 20; Stevens, 2016: 120).

Thanks to victory over the Armada, New Elizabethans credit the original Elizabethan age as the time in which 'England awaken[ed] to greatness' and the English became

aware of themselves as a distinct ‘people’ (Stevens, 2016: 120). Although New Elizabethans responded to 1950s *British* decline, and vocally promoted a unified Britishness at public events such as Elizabeth II’s coronation (Wiebe, 2005), they ‘turned emphatically to English culture’ for a sense of ‘Elizabethan authenticity’ and a ‘proud indigenous identity’ (Morra, 2016: 28–29). Favouring an English-centred conception of Britishness (Wellings, 2019), New Elizabethans obscured formal ties between Elizabethan England and Wales, and neglected the diversity inherent in subsequent unions with Scotland and Northern Ireland.

While mid-century New Elizabethans courted England’s past, their focus was not *only* on the past but on ‘past futures’ (Martin, 2004: Chapter 5). New Elizabethans advanced ‘optimistic formulations of modernity, technological adventure and the informing potential of an increasingly mythologized past’ (Coult, 2016: 230), spurred by a unique ‘spirit of creative invention’ (Morra, 2016: 24). Sixteenth-century Elizabethan England had indeed fostered a scientific revolution (Harkness, 2007) led by the ‘hypermasculine’ figure of the ‘Renaissance individualist’ (Wiebe, 2005: 156–157 quoting *The Spectator*, 1953), such as explorers Walter Raleigh and Francis Drake, who pursued the ‘benign expansionism’ of England’s early empire (Morra, 2016: 18). Over time, New Elizabethans expanded their inventory of national heroes, or ‘Great Men’ (Gossedge, 2016: 137), to include artistic icons and ‘maverick scientist[s]’ (Coult, 2016: 241).

The 1953 coronation of Elizabeth II showcased a New Elizabethan ‘return to the future’, drawing parallels with the ‘age of Elizabeth I as the original imperial moment: expansive and military, and marked by aggressive individualism’ (Wiebe, 2005: 147, 150). Yet while the ceremony projected images of the nation as a ‘continuous’ global power, this ‘was less a representation of Britain *as it was* than a vision of Britain *as it ought to be*’ (Wiebe, 2005: 145, 157 emphasis added; Browning and Howe, this issue). Despite casting a hopeful national narrative, ‘the idea of loss hovered around the edges’ of the coronation, and New Elizabethanism more broadly (Wiebe, 2005: 172). Although the Commonwealth provided an optimistic vision of how empire might be reimaged and sustained (Crossley, 2024: 14), a ‘melancholy and uneasy’ national mood accompanied a post-war environment characterised by decolonisation and rising Cold War tensions (Coult, 2016: 241; Morra, 2016). In this context, the coronation offered a ‘reassuring’ narrative of national continuity across centuries, ‘where one modern Elizabethan era could now give way to the next’ (Morra, 2016: 21). By disguising decline with continuity and invoking the national past as a template for the future, the coronation and its New Elizabethan champions were essentially nostalgic (Crossley, 2024: 21; Morra, 2016: 39; Wiebe, 2005: 142). However, this was not nostalgia in its conventional backward-looking form. This was nostalgia that emphasised hope and modernity over melancholia and loss. Nostalgia where the ‘past would act as an inspiration for future action’ (Wiebe, 2005: 148) in changing and uncertain times (Melhuish, 2022; cf. Wellings and Baxendale, 2015).

The dual reassuring and inspiring functions of this form of nostalgia have, I argue, underwritten the durability of New Elizabethan ideals from mid-20th-century Britain to the present day. While heritage and modernity continue to fuse in national ceremonial occasions, this ‘Janus-faced’ outlook is more broadly apparent in narratives framing Britain’s perceived decline (Zaidi, 2008). These themes resurfaced notably during the 2016 Brexit referendum, becoming a core pillar of post-referendum imaginaries of a Global Britain (Atkins, 2022; Daddow, 2019).

Making Britain global again – The new Elizabethanism of the Brexiteers

Brexit discourses frequently invoked the Elizabethan past. Eurosceptics presented themselves as ‘swashbuckling’ and ‘buccaneering’ (Saunders, 2020: 25), becoming known as ‘Brexiteers’ akin to famous 16th-century privateers like Drake (Campanella and Dassù, 2019: 43). Elizabethan parallels also animated the official Vote Leave campaign’s insistence that post-Brexit Britain should reconnect to its potential as a global hub of innovation. On this view, as Britain’s EU membership had curtailed its imperially rooted global and futuristic course (Atkins, 2022: 222–223; Wellings, 2019), Brexit would enable a New Elizabethan return to the future, where decline could be halted and Britain could reimagine its post-imperial role as a world leader in science and technology. These ideas drew strongly on Eurosceptic traditions that had long advanced the concept of the Anglosphere – a loose collective of Britain’s former white settler colonies – as an alternative international network powered by technological advances (Kenny and Pearce, 2018). A racial understanding of Englishness is the implied core of Anglosphere imaginaries (Vucetic, 2011), defining compatibility between post-imperial nations as similarities of ‘blood, language, religion and laws’ (Kenny and Pearce, 2018: 12). While the Anglosphere’s proponents rhetorically emphasise Britishness, their agenda remains quietly rooted in an expansive English nationalist desire to reconnect with ‘English-speaking peoples’ abroad (Wellings, 2019: 28).

In addition to these long-standing narratives, Brexiteers’ New Elizabethan agenda also owed much to the specific political thought of Dominic Cummings – campaign director of Vote Leave and chief advisor to the post-referendum government of Conservative Prime Minister (PM) Boris Johnson. Cummings’ influence over science policy has been widely, if grudgingly, recognised by Parliament (e.g. Hansard, 2021c, 2021d; House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, 2021). Cummings’ New Elizabethanism is indebted to Barnes Wallis, the famous Second World War inventor of the bouncing bomb, who had become increasingly frustrated by an alleged post-war ‘lack of government support’ for science, compared with competitors like America (Zaidi, 2008: 71–72, 82). Wallis drew on New Elizabethanism to encourage the public sector to use science and technology to redress creeping decline, restore Britain’s hegemonic status, and explore new frontiers (Zaidi, 2008: 73). In 1959, he argued that scientific exploration would propel ‘this new Elizabethan Age’, with ‘great technologists’ adopting the role of the 16th-century Elizabethan ‘individual heroic explorer’ (quoted in Zaidi, 2008: 73–74). Ignoring compatible British intellectual traditions, such as the Scottish Enlightenment, Wallis explicitly argued that the English were uniquely inventive and posited England as the ‘centre of the civilised world’ (quoted in Zaidi, 2008: 69).

Wallis’ interpretation of New Elizabethanism was explicitly taken up by Cummings in the years preceding Brexit, although with differences in how nationhood was expressed. Cummings’ national narratives were less emphatically English, and instead reflected the tacitly English-centred Britishness characteristic of Anglosphere imaginaries. Cummings quoted Wallis’ 1965 call for ‘a new Elizabethan age’ to advocate for a similar ‘national rediscovery of future orientation’ (quoted in Melhuish, 2022: 1767–1770), renewing Britain’s world leadership in science and technology, with imperial connotations. On this view, the British state should promote innovation, but lacked the tools to do so effectively. As Cummings later explained, the free market right ‘tend to be ignorant of the contribution of government funding to the development of technologies’ (Cummings, 2018: 23).

Meanwhile, the left ‘tend to ignore the extremely damaging effects of bureaucratic cancers’ and lack insight about how to manage major industries (Cummings, 2018: 24). Despite these shortcomings, Britain retained the cultural ‘advantages (universities, language, legal system etc)’ and capitalist instincts shared by Anglosphere countries like America – Cummings’ preferred model of progress (Cummings, 2017, 2018: 26, 32, 45; Treasury Committee, 2016: 22–23).

For a brief period in the mid-20th century, the United States had struck the right balance between freedom and state sponsorship in its creation of the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). Although Wallis had been wary of America as a rival power (Zaidi, 2008), Cummings’ instinctive admiration of the United States remained broadly compatible with New Elizabethan principles. Financed by the US government, ARPA belonged to a ‘Golden Age’ of funders, which promoted ‘edge-of-the-art science/technology research’ (Cummings, 2018: 3; 24–25). It had been successful in providing small grants for innovative projects that had eventually given rise to major technological breakthroughs like the Internet. According to Cummings, ARPA thrived by promoting individual freedom and ‘debureaucratisation’ (Cummings, 2018; House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, 2021: 17). The agency was driven by New Elizabethan ‘visionaries’ – not only scientists but leaders like Joseph Licklider and Robert Taylor – great men with an apparent knack for betting on scientific talent (Cummings, 2018: 2, 15). Such figures were emblems of ‘individualistic brilliance overcoming systemic conservatism [and the] (stifling) old ways’ (Croft, 2012: 135), much like the ‘odd individuals’ and ‘[w]eirdos and misfits’ that Cummings later sought to recruit to the British government (Cummings, 2018: 38, 2020).

Cummings’ political thought reveals competing mid-20th-century visions of the future, which uncritically contrasted the EU’s allegedly backward ‘1950s model of bureaucratic centralism’ with the similarly-aged but futuristic ARPA (Cummings, 2018: 5). However, like earlier New Elizabethans, Cummings’ focus on the future was strongly underwritten by nostalgic images of Britain’s past futures, describing not only what the modern nation ought to be but what it ‘could have been’ (Boym, 2001: 351). This forward-looking nostalgia expressed not just a longing for ‘modernization as it was’ in 1950s America (Boym, 2011), but also an ambition to recapture the lost promise of Britain’s imperial past and explore what the country may still become after Brexit (Browning, 2019). In recent years, the optimistic pursuit of greatness through scientific and technological innovation has been repackaged as ‘Anglofuturism’ – a movement which combines industrial strategy with an often explicitly racialised interpretation of the future’s potential.

‘A bold vision for 21st-century Britain’: From new Elizabethanism to Anglofuturism

Anglofuturism takes many forms. A basic Internet search for the term returns several competing ‘manifestos’, often anonymously or pseudonymously published (e.g. Anonymous, 2024; de Rebel, 2024; Horsa, 2023). Anglofuturism describes itself as a ‘whole new mental model for Britain and the Anglosphere’ (de Rebel, 2023). It is a worldview which ‘harnesses the optimism and high modernism of the post-war era’ (Roussinos, 2022) and uses ‘our ingenuity, creativity, and technological acumen to power a bold vision for 21st-century Britain, fearlessly embracing radical new ways of doing things that can exponentially change our world’ (de Rebel, 2023). The movement is sometimes humorous. *Anglofuturism Aesthetics* (Kunley, 2023) – a moderately popular Twitter/X

thread of images created using artificial intelligence (AI) – pokes fun at the idea of national decline. Its renderings of futuristic skyscrapers, high-speed rail, and space missions, alongside traditional British symbols like the union flag and Parliament, find amusing ways to highlight the country's historically rooted potential. However, blogs encourage us to 'take Anglofuturism seriously' (Jones, 2024) and view it as 'more than [an] aesthetic' (Anonymous, 2024). Here, Anglofuturism intersects with long-standing attempts to reinvigorate Britain's industrial strategy – an agenda sponsored by a variety of lobbyists (see Jones, 2024; Key, 2024) and competing governments, as in Conservative PM Rishi Sunak's (2023) and Labour PM Keir Starmer's (2025) shared interest in how AI may enhance state capacity.

In one sense, Anglofuturism is a pragmatic, optimistic, and sometimes playful response to questions of decline which permeate both domestic and international perceptions of the United Kingdom (Houde, this issue). However, this interpretation overlooks how the 'Anglo' in Anglofuturism shapes how the future is imagined. Although this is the first academic study of 'Anglofuturism', references to an 'Anglo future' have occasionally featured in histories of the Anglosphere. Late Victorians imagined that a flourishing Anglo future would emerge from the formal union of Britain and America (Bell, 2021). American industrialist Andrew Carnegie was a major early proponent, arguing for an Anglo-American alliance – a 'utopian' vision where 'the English-speaking nations could control the future of the world, insure [sic] perpetual peace and prosperity, and maybe advance the advent of the millennium' (Beresford, 1894 quoted in Bell, 2021: 72). Although a formal union of Anglo-America is now rarely proposed, Anglofuturists view the United States as a byword for modernity and global power (Horsa, 2023), as in Cummings' appeals to ARPA. Like in broader versions of the Anglosphere, Anglo-America is also a code for how race, sometimes euphemistically described as culture, should unite the former white settler colonies of the British empire (Vucetic, 2011). References to the Anglo future thus rely (explicitly or implicitly) on the nostalgic 'figure' of the Anglo (cf. Price, 2025) – a white, male Anglo-Saxon hero who advanced Britain's imperial interests through his 'strong, well-rounded' (Harris, 2023: 114) and uniquely gifted nature (Gossedge, 2016). As members of what British empire-builder Cecil Rhodes dubbed the 'first race in the world', Anglo 'great men' provided the rationale underpinning empire's civilising mission since: 'the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race' (quoted in Rutherford, 2022: 142).

While some Anglofuturists claim to be anti-racist (Anonymous, 2024), others speak subtly but suggestively of the promise of Britain's traditional 'culture' (Roussinos, 2022). Yet others explicitly lament that 'the Empire is now our greatest shame' (de Rebel, 2023), scoff at decolonisation efforts attributed to 'the world-eating mind virus called wokeness' and argue that 'Individualist Anglos must embrace their ethnic identity' (Horsa, 2023). Similar themes inspire the supposedly humorous social media posts, noted above, which feature images including imperial hero Admiral Nelson, and a spaceship targeting migrants crossing the English Channel. Captions on further images, including 'A Nation Proud of its History and At Ease with Itself – Ready to Expand' and 'Britain's Space Navy – New Frontiers for the Intrepid Anglo-Saxon', reinforce associations with empire (Kunley, 2023). These versions of Anglofuturism reflect a 'bimodal' understanding of nationhood which is both 'Town and country. Crown and parliament. Norman and Saxon. The pleasantness of the shire is cultivated by its contrast with the wide world of adventure that lies beyond' (Horsa, 2023). As with New Elizabethan and Anglospherist discourses, the 'British' nation invoked by Anglofuturists has England at its heart. This

outlook mirrors Brexiteers' dual appeals to the 'Global Britain' of foreign adventure and the insular 'Little England' of a home front to be protected from 'invasion'. As the homeliness of Little England is often used as a metaphor for whiteness, the bimodal outlook of Anglofuturism implies how a desire for imperial adventure goes hand in hand with a desire to protect the domestic boundaries of race and nation (Melhuish, 2024).

Anglofuturist proposals for a Global Britain propelled by scientific and technological prowess draw on the forward-looking nostalgia of New Elizabethanism. But the racial nature of the term, often explicitly invoked by its proponents, suggests that a more conventional, backward-looking form of nostalgia is also present. Ideas about white racial superiority animate expansive proposals for the nation's scientific advancement, connecting Anglofuturism with a broader 'new tech right' (Slobodian, 2023), interested in racist, 'scientific' methods of making the nation great again. These themes surfaced in debates surrounding the United Kingdom's creation of ARIA – an unorthodox funding structure aiming to reinvent Britain as a global science superpower.

What's in a name? ARIA and the reinvention of a global science superpower

The post-Brexit Global Britain strategy, formulated by PM Theresa May's Conservative government (2016–2019), was partly premised on the nation's reputation for 'cutting edge research and innovation' (Daddow, 2019: 11–12) and 'remarkable capacity for discovery and invention' (Atkins, 2022: 222). Initially counselled by Cummings, the subsequent Johnson government (2019–2022) advanced this focus on the material and symbolic power of science and technology further still. As its 'Integrated Review' of 'Global Britain in a competitive age' commented:

Keeping the UK's place at the leading edge of science and technology will be essential to our prosperity and competitiveness . . . Our aim is to have secured our status as a **Science and Tech Superpower** by 2030 . . . (UK Government, 2021b: 4, emphasis original).

The Integrated Review laid the groundwork for a new autonomous science funding agency: ARIA (UK Government, 2021b: 36). Eventually established in January 2023 under Sunak's government (2022–2024), ARIA was tasked with reinventing Britain as a 'global science superpower' by circumventing bureaucracy and sponsoring 'high risk, high reward' research (UK Government, 2021a, 2023a, 2023b). Before its establishment, proposals for ARIA went through a lengthy period of parliamentary scrutiny. These debates revealed how the heroic individualism, shared by New Elizabethanism and Anglofuturism, shaped the agency down to its name. As Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) Angela Richardson observed:

ARIA is an inspired acronym. In music, an aria is a self-contained melodious piece for one voice, not the whole orchestra, and so this encapsulates the vision (Hansard, 2021c).

Conceived as a British ARPA – like the US Advanced Research *Projects* Agency – the appellative shift towards *invention* emphasised the UK government's belief that individual brilliance would be the agent of progress. As Labour's Viscount Stansgate observed, 'invention' has stronger connotations of unique genius than 'projects', which suggests collaboration (Hansard, 2021e). Yet for other observers it invoked silly eccentricity:

“invention” strikes me a bit like something in the 1950s, with somebody emerging from a shed with a gadget that has just blown their hair off” (Hansard, 2021b). Others also drew scathing parallels between ARIA’s individualism and the first Elizabethan era. Summoning the ghosts of 16th-century privateers, Labour’s Ed Miliband – then Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) – questioned the rationality of an agency which ‘let a bunch of *buccaneering* individuals do what they liked’ (Hansard, 2021c, emphasis added).

The language of individual brilliance was a hallmark of the ARIA Bill’s passage through Parliament. References to iconic ‘national’ heroes abounded – particularly historic inventors, engineers, and scientists. These heroes were predominantly white English men, with scant references to the historical contributions of women, minorities, and those from the UK’s Celtic nations. Barnes Wallis himself was briefly invoked, as were other ‘great men’ of history like Charles Darwin, Isaac Newton, Edward Jenner, and Tim Berners-Lee (e.g. Hansard, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e). These inventories pointed to a nostalgic continuity of heroic achievement, where landmark discoveries (like gravity) and inventions (from the first vaccines to the World Wide Web) inevitably followed one after another. Labour’s Chi Onwurah – then shadow science minister – spoke for many of her colleagues when she argued that ‘the UK has a proud tradition in science, engineering, innovation, research and development; it is renowned across the world’ (Hansard, 2021c, 2021d).

This broad nostalgic discourse of national endeavour founded on heroic individualism also implied a more specific orientation towards the imperial past, compatible with New Elizabethan and Anglofuturist ideas about the nature of exploration. Invention and scientific discovery were narrated through imperially rooted frontier masculinity (Hooper, 2001), echoing US ARPA director Licklider’s observation that: ‘On the frontier, man must often chart his course by stars he has never seen’ (quoted in Cummings, 2018: 15). ARIA’s mission thus rested on a heroic willingness to embrace the unknown. As Onwurah put it, ‘UK science has pushed back the boundaries of knowledge, shrinking the vast expanses of ignorance which . . . may threaten humanity’s very existence’ (Hansard, 2021c). Others spoke of ARIA’s potential for ‘edge of the edge’ scientific research – ‘lasing the moon’ so that Britain could ‘get to the future first’ (e.g. Hansard, 2021a, 2021c). The agency itself was also presented as experimental (e.g. Hansard, 2021a, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e). Conferring objectivity and persistence, ARIA’s independence from government and tolerance of failure suggested that it was institutionally grounded in the scientific method.

While many aspects of the agency invoked futurity, this orientation was underwritten by *imperial* nostalgia: a longing to reconnect the nation with a particular trajectory of greatness rather than reinstate the British Empire per se (Lorcin, 2013). Imperial nostalgia downplays the violence of empire and melancholy associated with Britain’s post-imperial status. Instead, it offers an optimistic vision of the nation that is simultaneously forward-looking and underpinned by the confidence that Britain’s imperial history inspires. Yet loss lingers around the edges of this form of nostalgia – as it had for the 1950s New Elizabethans. The government’s overarching aim of reinvigorating Britain’s global science superpower status prompted a spectrum of parliamentary reflections on the national story. Some invoked innate national greatness, implying continuity from imperial Britain to the present. As Conservative MP Ian Liddell-Grainger argued: ‘Let us use what is great about Britain, which is our ability to think outside the box, laterally, in a way that turns the world on. Rah-rah Britain . . .’ (Hansard, 2021c). The ‘heroic’ response to the

Covid-19 pandemic aided this impression. Many MPs praised Britain's 'visionary' and 'brilliant' Covid scientists, particularly the role they had played in developing the first vaccine and 'jabbing our way to freedom' (Hansard, 2021c, 2021d). Others suggested that, thanks to the vaccine taskforce's creativity and rejection of bureaucracy, 'there is a real read-across from what happened with Covid to ARIA' (Hansard, 2021c, 2021e). Although the taskforce's female chair, Kate Bingham, was sometimes praised (Hansard 2021b, 2021e, 2023), a persistent focus on superheroic endeavour ensured that the framing of the Covid response remained masculinised. As Conservative MP Duncan Baker argued:

We *are* a scientific superpower. If anyone has any doubt about that, or about what we are capable of, they need only look at what we have achieved in this great nation in the last year (Hansard, 2021c emphasis added).

However, many parliamentarians used more cautious language to frame the government's plans. Here, Britain's global science superpower status was either something that was under threat or something that was, as yet, an unrealised ambition. Some acknowledged that Britain was no longer the imperial workshop of the world and needed to work to preserve a residual competitive edge in science and technology. This camp included many government representatives, such as Kwasi Kwarteng (then Secretary of State for BEIS), who tacitly recognised that Britain's global status had already declined, or was under pressure from international rivals (Hansard, 2021c, 2021d). Nostalgic loss was implied in the need to 'cement', 'improve', 'reinforce', 'retain', and 'secure' the nation's global scientific standing, or to 'remain' a leader in this area (Hansard, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e, 2021f) – sentiments also expressed in the government's own Integrated Review (UK Government, 2021b: 4).

Others presented Britain's global ambitions in science and technology as a liminal process of 'becoming' – a country's continual efforts to live up to a nostalgic, fantasy image of itself that 'always remains just out of reach' (Browning, 2019: 231). Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party MP, Jim Shannon, hoped that the government's science strategy would enable the United Kingdom to 'become all we can become' (Hansard, 2021d). As he argued further, 'What we have achieved with the Covid vaccine . . . is an indication that greatness still awaits' (Hansard, 2021d). Others spoke similarly of 'unlocking' and 'unleashing' the nation's global potential, and 'catapult[ing] our great industries on to the world stage' (Hansard, 2021c, 2021d, 2021f). However, House of Lords peers often took a more critical view, emphasising the contingency involved in 'becoming'. Here, the government's new science policy was an 'empty slogan' which lacked a convincing implementation strategy (House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, 2022: 3). As Viscount Stansgate observed:

The UK *is* world class, but it is a competitive world out there and this Bill matters to our future *if we are to be* the science superpower we all want us *to be* (Hansard, 2021e emphasis added).

Parliamentary debates about ARIA also featured the civilisational themes attributed to *colonial* nostalgia, a counterpart of imperial nostalgia, which instead emphasises Britain's historic ability to change the world (Lorcin, 2013). When Cummings gave evidence to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee (2021: 17), he stressed ARIA's potential to foster 'ideas that could change civilisation completely'. He had previously

made similar claims in blogs invoking a ‘technological civilisation’ where scientific talent and new technologies can ‘amplify’ and ‘significantly change the trajectory of human civilisation’ (Cummings, 2018: 1–3; 42). However, a sense of Britain’s declining influence was sometimes also explicitly present for Cummings (2018: 5): projects like ARIA were a cornerstone of ‘what post-Brexit Britain should do to help itself and the world’, enabling it to ‘contribute usefully to the world’s biggest problems instead of continuing its embarrassing trajectory’.

Parliamentarians also commonly linked ARIA to a broader mission of improving the world through science, with Britain’s post-imperial reputation boosted once more by its formulation of Covid vaccines. Government science minister Amanda Solloway endorsed ARIA’s promise to ‘change the world in ways that none of us . . . would dare to imagine today’ (Hansard, 2021d). Similarly, Conservative MP Anthony Higginbotham urged that Britain’s renewed focus on science ‘should aim to shape the world – not just the world we know now, but the world decades into the future’ (Hansard, 2021c). Many others anticipated ARIA’s capacity to help Britain ‘transform’ and ‘improve’ lives across the world, and address global challenges, emphasising continuity with its historic world role (Hansard, 2021c, 2021e). Nevertheless, some doubted ARIA’s ability to provoke similarly sweeping changes at home, arguing that the United Kingdom remained synonymous with southern England for many in power, underlining the tacitly English-centred Britishness favoured by ARIA’s proponents (Hansard, 2021g).

So far, the nostalgias surrounding ARIA’s creation have been forward-looking in character. Britain’s imperial and colonial past have been invoked but only implicitly, and typically as a resource for future inspiration, drawing on the ‘benign’ imperialism of the first Elizabethan age. Of course, the violent nature of the British Empire ensures that these forms of nostalgia are also racialised. But forward-looking nostalgia’s capacity to sanitise uncomfortable histories in favour of a positive and progressive outlook conceals its relationship with race. Race seldom appeared in parliamentary debates about ARIA, and only in the euphemistic cultural terms commonly used to describe the Anglosphere. Conservative Lord Holmes, for example, highlighted how Britain’s ‘great good fortune of the combination of common law, the financial centre in London, the English language, geography, time zone [etcetera]’ would aid Britain’s scientific success (Hansard, 2023). New Elizabethans and Anglofuturists had previously used similar terms to describe the nation’s natural attributes, as noted above. However, the racialised underpinnings of forward-looking nostalgia became increasingly apparent in parliamentary scrutiny of ARIA’s relationship with far-right networks interested in pursuing greatness by resurrecting ‘scientific’ racial hierarchies.

The dark side of progress: Anglofuturism and scientific racism

Many politicians and science experts praised ARIA’s minimal bureaucracy, which they considered necessary for fostering path-breaking scientific advances, like the Covid vaccines (Hansard, 2021a, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e, 2021f). However, ARIA’s institutional foundation raised questions about the politics of scientific funding, institutions, and practices. ARIA was established in a way that mostly shields it from scrutiny and accountability. Although it is required to publish annual reports and accounts, and give evidence to parliamentary select committees when requested, ARIA is not subject to Freedom of Information (FOI) laws (UK Government, 2023a: 2, 10). FOI requests can be made to

ARIA's institutional parent – the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology – but ARIA itself is not compelled to provide information in service of these claims (UK Government, 2023a: 2). As Lord Davies scornfully remarked, 'the agency "will be an outward facing body which will proactively provide information about its activities" – except when people ask' (Hansard, 2021e). For Onwurah, limiting democratic oversight risked replicating government failures, particularly Covid-era cronyism in public procurement. Here, ARIA's protected status may offer a 'side-door to [government] sleaze in science' (Hansard, 2021d).

Despite Onwurah's concerns, in practice ARIA is largely autonomous from government. Ministers do not formally have a say in what it does, nor where it directs its funds (UK Government, 2023a: 1). However, there are more obscure and serious accountability problems relating to ARIA's institutional status than familiar objections to cronyism imply. The projects that ARIA funds with its modest £800 million budget are – modelled on America's ARPA – subject to the 'good taste' and 'creative control' of its director and programme managers (House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, 2021: 9; ARIA, n.d.). Such judgements inevitably preclude democratic deliberation about what the nation's scientific priorities should be. This was noted by parliamentary scrutineers who questioned whether ARIA should instead be tasked with particular 'missions' – directed from the outset to tackle pressing challenges, such as climate change (Hansard, 2021a, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e, 2021f). 'Taste' can also have darker connotations. As Conservative MP Katherine Fletcher observed, 'taste is one of those subjective human things that we need to be careful and worry about when concentrating great power in a small number of hands' (House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, 2021: 9). ARIA's autonomy places significant 'trust' in its leaders acting with 'integrity' (Hansard, 2021a).

These concerns became acute in 2021, when Cummings suggested American physicist and genetics entrepreneur, Steve Hsu, as one of his preferred candidates to lead ARIA (House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, 2021: 11; Shanks, 2021). Hsu is a controversial figure thanks to his work on the purported genetic basis of intelligence. In 2020, Hsu's interest in selecting embryos for superior intelligence provoked accusations of eugenics – a 'scientific' practice once widely celebrated for its potential to make a nation's inhabitants 'better, healthier and stronger' (Rutherford, 2022: 12–14). 'Positive' eugenics promotes the genetic or social engineering of supposedly innate 'desirable traits' like intelligence, while its 'negative' counterpart aims to expunge 'undesirable traits' (Rutherford, 2022: 16). Yet in practice, positive and negative eugenics are interdependent since 'selecting *for* desirable traits must mean that other traits are less desirable, and are therefore being selected *against*' (Rutherford, 2022: 57, *emphasis original*). Eugenics thus promotes ableism and perpetuates gendered, racialised, and classed social inequalities (Duster, 2003).

Scientifically defining identities and groups is an authoritative move (Reardon, 2011: 226), helping some to 'restore sense out of disorder' by 'putting things back into familiar places' (Jasanoff, 2004: 39). On this view, eugenics is a scientific form of social control, emerging thanks to 'declinism' – a dissatisfaction with the disorderly present and conviction that things were better in the past (Rutherford, 2022: 113). Eugenics, like broader attempts at population control, thus responds to fears about national fragility with nostalgic efforts to preserve the past's 'natural' social order (Melhuish, 2024). This may include seemingly benign attempts to improve population quality and a nation's competitive prospects – as in the Soviet Union's 'positive' eugenic attempts to 'breed a new, better man'

(Bardziński, 2013: 57) – which nonetheless reproduce traditional social hierarchies and governance methods (Paul, 1984). Although the extreme negative eugenics associated with the Holocaust is now considered ‘irredeemably toxic’ in mainstream circles (Rutherford, 2022: 12–14), we must therefore remain attentive to how public policies can keep eugenicist inclinations alive, whether ‘by intention or by effect’ (Shilliam, 2021: 9).

In 2020, Hsu’s work on hereditary intelligence and genetic engineering caused students to successfully call for his removal from a research governance role at Michigan State University (Rutherford, 2022: 200). Studies of hereditary intelligence were central to the eugenics promoted by early 20th-century intellectuals like Francis Galton – half-cousin of Charles Darwin, the godfather of natural selection theory. Applying Darwin’s insights to the question of human ‘hereditary genius’, Galton used unsound and circular methods to argue that intellect is innate to individuals and patrilineal – genetically ‘passed from fathers to sons’ (Rutherford, 2022: 47). Galton wanted to create ‘a “utopia” of highly bred super people’ (Saini, 2019: 69) consisting of ‘great men’ who ‘live great lives because they’re great’ (Harris, 2023: 118). As eugenics views the ‘citizenry as national resource’ in an ‘era of national competition’ (Harris, 2023: 115), such desires are intimately connected with countering perceived national decline. Contemporary race scientists similarly endorse the concept of ‘national intelligence’ to argue that a country’s economic power is directly linked to the genetically defined abilities of its inhabitants (Saini, 2019: 106–121). Eugenics prescribes policies that attempt to manipulate the quality of this resource through ‘nature’ (biology) and/or ‘nurture’ (environmental policies like education, targeted at those judged to already have superior innate ability) (Shilliam, 2018: 50). The latter practice was a central feature of Soviet eugenics (Bardziński, 2013: 61) and is sometimes dubbed ‘bionomics’ (Harris, 2023: 18).

Eugenicist studies of intelligence are tied further to the definition of racial difference through their reliance on the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) metric. IQ tests, assessing verbal and numerical reasoning ability, create a ‘quantified, unidimensional and hierarchical’ understanding of intelligence deployed politically to ‘make social decisions seem objective and fair’ (Carson, 2004: 182; 203). Flawed IQ research provides pseudoscientific fuel for racist claims that white people are naturally more intelligent than black people – theories which have long informed racially discriminatory sterilisation, immigration, and military selection policies (Duster, 2003; Rutherford, 2022: 45). Yet there is no valid evidence that genes disproportionately determine IQ. Intelligence and intellectual attainment are instead shaped by myriad social factors, including income, education policy, and ‘racism itself’ (see Saini, 2019: 228–236). IQ tests are therefore a powerful ‘technology’ claiming to ‘explain’ social order while actually producing it (Carson, 2004: 191, 196).

Hsu’s work has previously been used by white nationalists like Steve Sailer (Jackson, 2020), who link the congenital intelligence of a country’s inhabitants with its economic prospects (Saini, 2019: 135–137). This ‘cult of IQ’ is also stubbornly attractive to a broader ‘new tech right’ where far-right race scientists, Anglofuturists, and Silicon Valley ‘tech bros’ interact, sharing interests in promoting a super-race of ‘great men’ (Harris, 2023; Slobodian, 2023). This scene contains a spectrum of views, from explicit calls for the restoration of white Anglo-Saxon supremacy to the quieter promotion of racial hierarchies of intelligence. Here, ‘Caucasians, East Asians and Ashkenazi Jews’ implicitly form the superior, governing ‘cognitive elite’ (Slobodian, 2023). This hierarchy is principally anti-Black, with race viewed as a ‘biocultural assemblage’ where intellect is equated with proximity to whiteness and paler bodies can be ‘transmuted into Anglo-Saxons through . . . acculturation and work on the self’ (Bell, 2021: 28, 34, 373). Such racial

ordering has persisted from empire where whiteness was synonymous with ‘modernity’ (Saini, 2019: 26), through the early 20th-century eugenics movement and into supposedly inclusive visions of a modern Anglosphere, which remain constructed around a white core (Shilliam, 2018: 43; Vucetic, 2011).

ARIA is connected to the new tech right’s interest in IQ through its chief architect, Cummings (Slobodian, 2023). Hsu’s work on the genetic determinants of intelligence has long infused Cummings’ own views about IQ and eugenics. Cummings (2014) has written about his interest in Hsu’s theories, although stating his concern that embryo selection practices may replicate class inequalities, unless widely available (Rutherford, 2022: 204). However, Cummings’ association with eugenics and race science exceeds his relationship with Hsu. His 2020 call to recruit ‘odd individuals’ to government was criticised when a new hire was found to have made comments linking race and intelligence on Cummings’ own blog (Rutherford, 2022: 206–207). During 2013, as a special advisor in the Department for Education, Cummings also controversially claimed that genes account for over two thirds of a child’s educational attainment (Wintour, 2013). On his blog, Cummings has also consistently promoted views reminiscent of bionomics – the eugenicist manipulation of social policies favouring those deemed to already possess superior biological ability. He has advocated for Soviet-inspired ‘Kolmogorov schools’ for students with ‘1:1,000 and higher abilities in maths’ and similarly argued that those in ‘the top 2% of IQ’ should be schooled ‘outside the existing national curriculum and exam system’ (e.g. Cummings, 2018: 32–33). For Cummings, such children are ‘a precious resource for humanity and we should treat them appropriately’ (2018: 33). Prioritising maths and science would also enhance Britain’s culturally superior economic system: ‘Competitive markets in the Anglo-American tradition would be even more successful if their political institutions provided some funding for maths and science’ (Cummings, 2018: 32).

Cummings’ suggestion of Hsu as a potential ARIA director, plus his own long-standing interest in IQ and economic performance, therefore also raised ethical questions in Parliament about the agency’s eugenicist potential. Scottish National Party MP Stephen Flynn called for eugenicist views to bar potential candidates for ARIA’s director (Hansard, 2021c). Flynn also questioned ARIA’s potential to fund research that would violate human rights, pointing to ‘the situation in China with the Uyghurs’ (Hansard, 2021d). While he did not elaborate, Flynn’s statement clearly referred to China’s compulsory sterilisation of Muslim Uyghur women in detention camps – the latest in a string of policies designed to keep the country’s birth rate and ‘cultural’ integrity in check (Rutherford, 2022: 155–156). During a House of Commons Science and Technology Committee (2021: 11) hearing, Labour’s Dawn Butler also directly asked Cummings if he ‘consider[ed] eugenics to be a science, and do you think it needs more research?’. Cummings responded with a non-answer (see Shanks, 2021) – a common approach to avoiding politically thorny parliamentary questions (Melhuish and Yong, 2025) – stating ‘I do not really know what you mean by eugenics’ (House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, 2021: 11). Instead, Cummings cited Britain’s status as a centre for more palatable ‘genomics’ research, though noted that new technologies in this area ‘have [both] huge promise and the potential to cause huge disasters’ (House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, 2021: 11). Parliamentarians and experts also invoked Britain’s excellence in genomics (Hansard, 2021c, 2021f), praising the ‘enormous range of data that could be made available to people through the likes of Genomics England’ (Hansard, 2021a).

These statements echoed May's original discussion of the kinds of historic discoveries that would fuel Global Britain (Atkins, 2022: 222).

By the time ARIA was established in 2023, concern about eugenics had subsided. Hsu's name was no longer floated as a leadership candidate. ARIA's inaugural director, Ilan Gur – a former programme director in contemporary America's ARPA family of research agencies – does not appear to hold similarly controversial views. However, we should remain concerned about ARIA and its potential to engage in the scientific racism of eugenics, which need not be as explicit as in efforts to prove the racial origins of intelligence. Scientific racism may simply be implied, allowing eugenics to happen by the 'backdoor' (Duster, 2003; Shanks, 2021). The genomics research quoted approvingly in Parliament is a prime example. Advances in this area mean that we can now document a wide range of genetic disorders, some of which appear more prevalent in black people (Saini, 2019: 250–251). This creates two problems. First, genetic screening offers the opportunity to eliminate embryos – notionally for 'therapeutic' reasons, but potentially also for 'aesthetic' ones (Duster, 2003: 127). Inevitably political 'hidden arguments' linger below the surface of screening programmes (Duster, 2003: 128 quoting Tesh, 1988), and potentially reflect racialised judgements about whose lives are viable (Squire, 2017). The second problem is that the genomic identification of racial health disparities reifies the idea of 'race' itself. Late 20th-century attempts to map human genome 'diversity' sought 'fundamental differences between human groups' (Saini, 2019: 142). Rather than '*constructing*' categories, 'genomic scientists describe themselves as *discovering* differences that already exist' (Reardon, 2011: 218–219, emphasis original). Although the language of 'race' has yielded to sanitised terms like 'population' and 'human variation', the idea persists that race is a legitimate biological category rather than a social construct, and continues to influence how mainstream scientific studies are conducted (Saini, 2019: 142–156, 250–266).

More broadly, ARIA's emergence from networks of thinkers espousing racially coded ideas about IQ and the individual brilliance of 'great men', plus insufficient democratic oversight flattening controversies surrounding scientific research and its funding, should cause us to reflect on how science is 'essentially political' (Brown, 2015: 9–11). Science is always shaped by ideological and emotional structures and the preferences of individual scientists, policymakers and administrators like Cummings and Hsu (Carson, 2004; Reardon, 2011; Saini, 2019). In their capacity to 'classify, confer identity, act as repositories of memory and forgetting, and [potentially] make life-and-death decisions for society', the scientific institutions that these interactions create are important sites of political power (Jasanoff, 2004: 40). On the surface, ARIA was promoted as a forward-looking and visionary project, albeit one that would nostalgically strive to resurrect Britain's lost potential. Its proponents believed that ARIA could address national decline and place Britain back on an imperially rooted path of greatness. However, ARIA's association with Anglofuturism and a new tech right interested in reinvigorating race science suggest how the forward-looking nostalgias of scientific advancement are often intertwined with a more conventionally nostalgic longing to promote racial hierarchies to make the nation great again.

Conclusion

This article has used the United Kingdom's establishment of ARIA as a window into the multifaceted nostalgic politics of Anglofuturism, and its relationship with broader

political constellations on the new tech right. Directing attention to the ‘Anglo’ in Anglofuturism, it has emphasised how the scientific pursuit of greatness is routinely attributed to white, male individual ‘heroes’ akin to visionary Elizabethan explorers. It has shown how this pursuit of greatness is associated with colonially rooted race science, which confers superior intelligence and ability on paler bodies, and is interested in how genetic and social engineering can harness high IQ individuals to the project of national economic performance. Empirically, the article has provided the first academic study of ‘Anglofuturism’, tracing its emergence from New Elizabethan, Anglospherist, and eugenicist movements. Conceptually, the article has complicated our understanding of nostalgia. Although it is typically thought of as a negative and melancholic emotion associated with a longing to return to the ‘good old days’, nostalgia can also shape political visions of a bright and hopeful future. Forward-looking nostalgia was embodied in ARIA’s promise to reinvigorate the ‘benign’ imperialism of the first Elizabethan age and reinvent Britain as a global science superpower akin to mid-20th-century America. However, when these ambitions are automatically underwritten by the achievements of white men, and ‘scientific’ interest in cultivating this demographic’s potential, forward-looking nostalgia has a dark side. The utopian vision of Anglofuturism is biased in ways that suggest the presence of a conventionally backward-looking nostalgia, which longs to reassert racial hierarchies to make the nation great again.

By complementing recent studies documenting the ‘return of race science’ (Pegg et al., 2024; Saini, 2019; Slobodian, 2023), the article also adds to postcolonial STS perspectives on the ‘essentially political’ nature of science more broadly (Brown, 2015: 9–11). Still predominantly conceived as objective, all science is inescapably shaped by individual and collective ‘social commitments’ (Reardon, 2011: 222). The ‘genomic categorization’ of humanity (Reardon, 2011: 222) vividly illustrates the power relations involved in reducing ‘individuals to standard classifications that demarcate the normal from the deviant and authorize varieties of social control’ (Jasanoff, 2004: 13). Race scientists often explicitly associate superior ‘natural’ ability with whiteness and argue that high IQ ‘populations’ can counter national decline. But race is also commonly invoked through euphemisms such as ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and its associated superior ‘culture’. While Anglofuturism as industrial strategy may seem a banal or benign project of anti-decliners, we should remain alert to the racialised imperial histories and colonial bodies that ‘Anglo’ signifies, as in the related term ‘Anglosphere’. Likewise, we should remember that the ‘positive’ eugenics of improving population quality through efforts to enhance innate intelligence is not an exclusive preserve of the far-right. Eugenics was once fashionable among supposed progressives (Paul, 1984).

Starmer’s nascent Labour government is also curious about Anglofuturism and its veneration of the cognitive elite. Minister Pat McFadden has adopted the project of civil service reform famously endorsed by ARIA’s architect, Dominic Cummings. Echoing Cummings’ advertisement for oddball data scientists, McFadden reportedly intends to import a Silicon Valley ‘startup’ culture to Whitehall, populated by disruptive secondees from the tech industry (Courea, 2024). Similar schemes are manifest in America, with the second Republican Trump administration appointing tech billionaire Elon Musk to head a new Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). Musk explicitly called for ‘high IQ small-government revolutionaries’ to volunteer at DOGE to cut wasteful spending and bureaucracy (Yang, 2024), mirroring Trump’s own long-standing appeals to IQ as an indicator of innate greatness (Cillizza, 2017). In his latest presidential campaign, Trump repeatedly referred to opponent Kamala Harris – who identifies as black – in racially

coded terms as a ‘low IQ individual’ (Featherstone, 2024). By contrast, prior to their summer 2025 feud, Trump used ‘racehorse theory’ to praise the abilities of Musk and his son, reasoning that ‘fast horses [like Musk] produce fast horses’ (Smith, 2025). Eugenacists have long used references to livestock breeding to justify their efforts to breed superior men (Rutherford, 2022). The Palo Alto educators and entrepreneurs who paved the way towards modern-day Silicon Valley were especially interested in applying methods that racehorse breeders developed to identify advanced ability (spotting the ‘blood that trots young’) so they could similarly breed ‘high IQ people’ to work ‘on the nation’s behalf’ (Harris, 2023: 118–125). Future research must reflect further on Davis’ (2022) provocation about the perils of pursuing greatness by exalting ‘great men’, and uncover the gendered and racialised ways in which Anglofuturist utopias are biased.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the journal editors, special issue editors, and two anonymous reviewers for their constructive engagement with this work. For lively conversations on the article’s research themes, my thanks also to Chris Hanretty, John Morris, and Ben Yong.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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