



New narratives of imperial politics in the 19th century

Antoinette M Burton

History, Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory, Gender and Women's Studies, National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA), Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation , Center for Advanced Study

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Abstract

Parliament cares about India little more than the Cabinet. The English people, too, are very slow and very careless about everything that does not immediately affect them. They cannot be excited to any effort of India except under the pressure of some great calamity, and when that calamity is removed they fall back into their usual state of apathy. (John Bright, 1860). The sentiment of empire is innate in every Briton. (William Gladstone, 1878) The trouble with the English is that their history happened overseas, so they don't know what it means. (Salman Rushdie, 1989) For historians of the nineteenth century, the question is, arguably, not whether empire had an impact on domestic life and experience, but how. The realm of high politics is a domain where those influences are most evident, though the role of imperialism in shaping it has received comparatively little attention. If historians have been slow to see and to recognise the impact of empire on 'domestic' history, Britons who followed high politics from the 1830s until just after Queen Victoria's death in 1901 could not have ignored the ways in which imperial questions impinged upon and helped to shape Victorian democracy across the nineteenth century. Swing rioters and other 'criminals' were exiled to Australia; opium debates made their way to the floor of the House; and Irishmen and women together with former Caribbean slaves were involved in Chartist agitations – whose spokesmen drew in turn on metaphors of slavery to inform their political demands.

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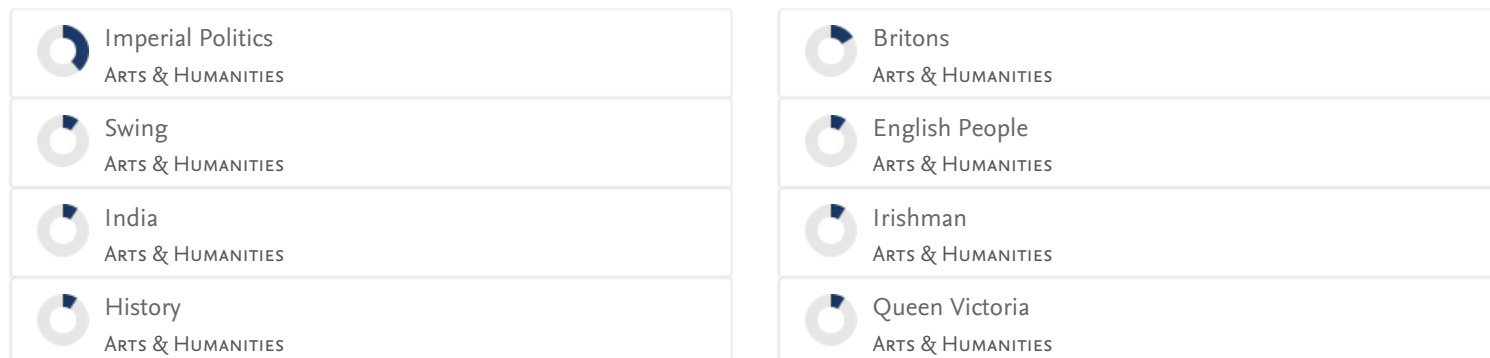
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Some historians prefer to divide 19th-century history into relatively small chunks. Thus, 1789–1815 is defined by the French Revolution and Napoleon; 1815–48 forms a period of reaction and adjustment; 1848–71 is dominated by a new round of revolution and the unifications of the German and Italian nations; and 1871–1914, an age of imperialism, is shaped by new kinds of political debate and the pressures that culminated in war. Between 1789 and 1849 Europe dealt with the forces of political revolution and the first impact of the Industrial Revolution. Between 1849 and 1914 a fuller industrial society emerged, including new forms of states and of diplomatic and military alignments. Focusing on New Zealand, the article analyzes the disputes over land and power in the British Empire in the mid-19th century. Occupied in the 1840s, the colony was central to debates about how the British should act globally. Held in the more. Focusing on New Zealand, the article analyzes the disputes over land and power in the British Empire in the mid-19th century. Amidst heroic hunting narratives and picturesque descriptions of local fauna and flora, stands out a curious episode in which Wallace describes adopting a baby orangutan, whose mother he had killed. Wallace, a British naturalist and collector, cultivated an affectionate relationship with the orphaned orangutan, often referring to her as his "baby."