Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830 - 1867
Catherine Hall


DESCRIPTION

Winner of the Morris D. Forkasch prize for the best book in British history 2002

Civilising Subjects argues that the empire was at the heart of nineteenth-century Englishness. English men and women in the mid-nineteenth century imagined themselves at the centre of a great empire: their mental and emotional maps encompassed 'Aborigines' in Australia, 'negroes' in Jamaica, 'coolies' in the Indies. This sense of the other provided boundaries and markers of difference: ways of knowing who was 'civilised' and who was 'savage'.

This fascinating book tells intertwined stories of a particular group of Englishmen and women who constructed themselves as colonisers. Hall then uses these studies as a means of exploring wider colonial and cultural issues. One story focuses on the Baptist missionaries in Jamaica and their efforts to build a new society in the wake of emancipation. Their hope was to make Afro-Jamaican men and women into people like themselves. Disillusionment followed as it emerged that the making of 'new selves' was not as simple as they had thought, and that black men and women had minds and cultural resources of their own. The second story tells the tale of 'the midland metropolis', Birmingham, and the ways in which its culture was infused with empire. Abolitionist enthusiasm dominated the town in the 1830s but by the 1860s the identity of 'friend of the negro' had been superseded by a harsher racial vocabulary. Birmingham's 'manly citizens' imagined the non-white subjects of empire as different kinds of men from themselves.
These two detailed studies, of Birmingham and Jamaica, are set within their wider context: the making of metropole and colony and of coloniser and colonised. The result is an absorbing study of the 'racing' of Englishness, which will be invaluable for students and scholars of British imperial and cultural history.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Hall is Professor of Modern British Social and Cultural History at University College, London

FEATURES

• An outstanding account of empire and identity

• Uses real and intriguing stories to show how empire was constructed and understood

• Draws a fascinating picture of the mindset of English men and women of the period

• Written in a lively, engaging style, this book should have great appeal for all those interested in imperial history

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