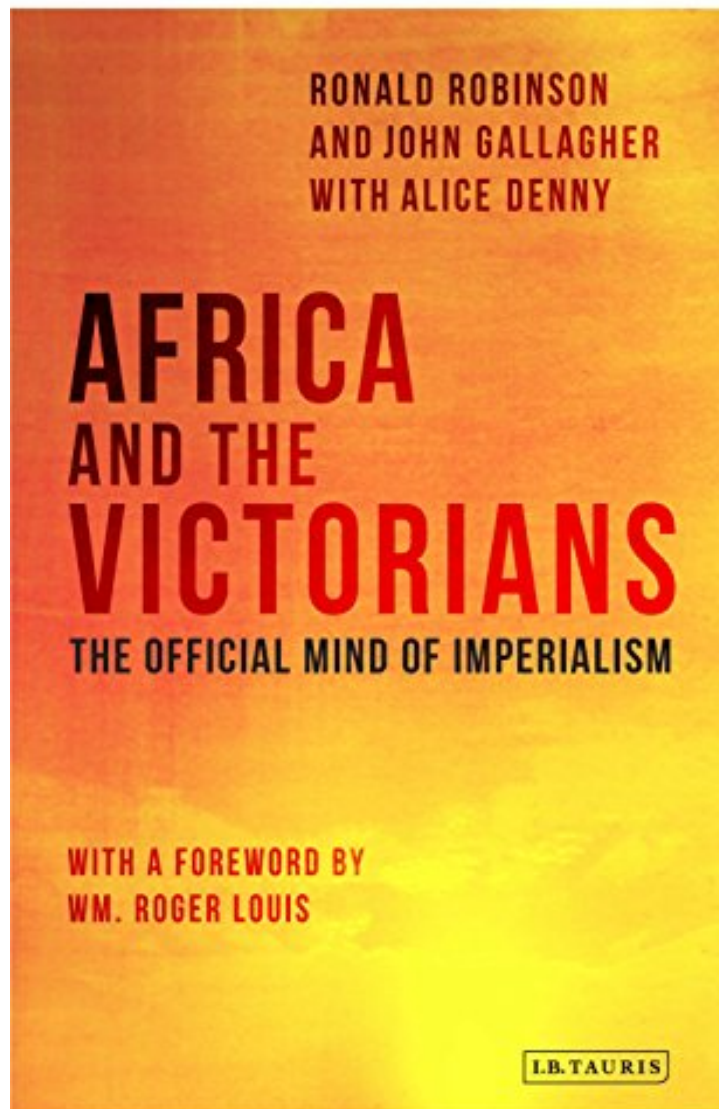


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Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism

From I.B.Tauris

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From I.B.Tauris : Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. a very important bookBy Silvester PercivalMany readers of AFRICA AND THE VICTORIANS have tended to view the book as little more than a textbook-like chronology of the

British scramble for Africa. But the true significance of the book is to expand the highly influential theory of British expansion that the authors originally articulated in "The Imperialism of Free Trade," an article which first appeared in the *Economic History Review* in 1953. The main argument of the book holds that British expansion in Africa occurred when crises on the periphery led the British government to intervene in defense of Britain's economic and strategic interests. Robinson and Gallagher argue that official thinking during the period of expansion after 1870 represents an essential continuity with the earlier mid-Victorian era, which was characterized by a belief in the benefits of free trade, and by a conviction that British informal influence would secure these economic benefits at the lowest possible cost for the British government. British leaders throughout the nineteenth century thus held the conviction that the government was responsible to intervene in imperial matters only when it was necessary to safeguard the empire of free trade. Expansion in Africa therefore presents a paradox: it remained the continent of least importance to British trade. For Robinson and Gallagher, the answer lies in the prominence accorded to India by British ministers, who rightfully recognized the subcontinent as the linchpin of the Empire. India attracted one-fifth of British trade and overseas investment. It provided for a self-financing Army. It held the key to power in the East. According to this interpretation, the imperial "scramble for Africa" after 1882 occurred not as a result of British ministers pursuing economic or commercial interests on the continent, but rather to defend Britain's strategic routes to India from local revolts and from increasing European rivalry. The British occupation of Egypt in 1882 became the decisive event in the imperial revolution in Africa, because it disrupted the European balance of power and set off a scramble. In Egypt and the Nile Valley, the British responded to Mediterranean instability and local revolts by occupying the territories crucial to the protection of the Suez Canal. In southern Africa, the British responded to the growing political preeminence of the gold-rich Transvaal republic by first attempting to cut it off from foreign support, and eventually by pushing the Dutch republic to the brink of war over the issue of British imperial influence on the Cape sea route to India. According to Robinson and Gallagher, there exists little evidence for public demand for empire in Britain, and even less evidence for a direct economic link between British ministers and colonial economic interests. In each of these instances, British motivations for imperial expansion in Africa traced to strategic interests, centered on India and its trade, in response to crises on the "periphery." The main weakness of this otherwise magnificent account lies in its reliance on "the official mind" - the statements recorded by British ministers in official documents. This methodological approach supports Robinson and Gallagher's attempt to create a unified theory of British imperialism, but it assumes that the rationale articulated by British ministers in official documents necessarily corresponded with the true motives for expansion -- a shortcoming that later books, especially Cain and Hopkins's *BRITISH IMPERIALISM*, have made more obvious. In its time (1961), the book was a valuable corrective to the commonly held view of empire, which assumed that British expansion was driven by the search for markets (an influence mainly of J.A. Hobson and Marxist theory). *AFRICA AND THE VICTORIANS'* emphasis on the "periphery" also anticipated the growing influence of "area studies" and post-colonial scholarship, both of which, in different ways, emphasize the "agency" and importance of the non-Western world in shaping imperial outcomes. Nearly fifty years later, this book is still considered one of the most important contributions to British imperial history ever written.

4 of 6 people found the following review helpful. When expansion was positive

By Mary E. Sibley

The Victorians had an expansive spirit. Most people believed in restricted government and free trade. Expansion seemed inevitable. The main engine of expansion was enterprise. Their trade associations were mostly with Europeans transplanted abroad. The idea of Africa moved British statesmen to act. The continuity of Victorian leadership was remarkable. The ends of Livingston and Gordon haunted the imagination as examples of embattled humanitarians. A policy of supporting trade was embraced in the middle of the nineteenth century under the belief that private enterprise could promote the interests of both commerce and philanthropy. On the continent, though, time-honored practices were upset by the presence of Europeans. There was a gulf between intention and effect. Up until the 1880's the British sought influence but no commitment on both coasts of Africa. In the west there were local chiefs and Liverpool traders in palm oil. In the east the British worked through the Sultan of Zanzibar. In the east the Arabs were useful allies. There was a conflict of interest since the British sought to extinguish all external and internal slave trading. The search for pliant native powers had resulted in one failure after another in promoting civilized activity and suppressing the slave trade in the interior. The British sought to devolve authority to make imperialism cheaper. The problem was that receptive African rulers were not strong and strong African rulers were not receptive to British influence. The Khedive of Egypt was broken by the expansion of the European economy. The Sultanate in Zanzibar was weakened by being made to enforce an alien ethic. South African politics changed with the discovery of diamonds. The continuity between mid and late Victorian policy is impressive. A forward policy raised strong criticism of Britain. In 1881 the Transvaal crisis was patched up. Next came the Suez crisis. Twenty years after Egypt was opened to free trade, the Khedive, living from loan to loan, was replaced by another and placed under strict controls by Britain and by France. The foreign controllers were practically dictators in finance. Occupation of Egypt was undertaken by Britain between 1882 and 1914. The British sought to leave Egypt, but the need for administration continued. The Egyptian affair had started the Scramble and ended the stand still arrangement. The Egyptian occupation destroyed the old informal systems on the coasts of Africa and unsettled the politics of south Africa. There was a pattern of colonial demands for imperial

extension and British resistance to it. The British wished to avoid arousing Afrikaner opinion. Britain became powerless to shut Germany out of south and east Africa because it relied on Germany in its stand-off with France over Egypt. It was determined to occupy Bechuanaland to dissipate the fear of German encroachment. After 1887 an inrush of mining and railway enterprise changed the shape of politics in south Africa. By 1894 the gold of Johannesburg was believed to be inexhaustible. There were humanitarian advocates of the colonial office set against the need to placate Boer interests. The new wealth and traffic of the Rand made it inevitable that Kruger would seek a railroad link through Portuguese territory for shipment of Transvaal gold. Cecil Rhodes sought imperial protection for his mining speculations. The company would plant a colony to occupy the country. Throughout 1889 humanitarian societies agitated against giving administrative authority to a commercial company. The government granted the charter fearing nationalism and republicanism in south Africa. The terms of the charter left little room for effective imperial control. Salisbury negotiated with German and Portuguese interests to obtain for Rhodes areas north of Zambesi. Economic imperialism is too simple a term to cover the mixed intentions of the British government. The company was chartered above all as a political instrument. From 1885 to 1900 British foreign policy was built on the designs of Lord Salisbury. It acquired a brilliance of formulation. He suffered from a fundamental defeatism. He had a static view of politics. Africa remained for him an intellectual problem. Baring, the British agent in Egypt, felt there could be no stability without the supervision of British officials and the presence of troops. He felt Egypt did not have suitable political cadres. The safety of the Nile became a supreme consideration. In 1889 when it was suggested to the Germans that the matter of Zanzibar be submitted to arbitration, the stage was set for the 1890's agreements. The Anglo-German agreement was badly received by France. Prolonged negotiations about west Africa with France created difficulties. England focused on the Niger River. England eventually invaded Sudan when conditions were suitable for victory there and ultimately fought the Boers to consolidate the holdings and colonies in the south of Africa and to bring everything under imperial control. In the end there was Joseph Chamberlain in the foreign office who wanted to undertake scientific administration of the imperial entities. At that point Salisbury was old and failing. Victorians were confronted with nationalist upsurges. During the first three quarters of the nineteenth century Britain enjoyed effortless supremacy. The book is of immense interest. Tables are included quantifying the scope of trade, geographical issues and the shifts in European control.

Imperialism in the eyes of the world is still Europe's original sin, even though the empires themselves have long since disappeared. Among the most egregious of imperial acts was Victorian Britain's seemingly random partition of Africa. In this classic work of history, a standard text for generations of students and historians now again available, the authors provide a unique account of the motives that went into the continent's partition. Distrusting mechanistic explanations in terms of economic growth or the European balance, the authors consider the intentions in the minds of the partitioners themselves. Decision by decision, the reasoning of prime ministers Gladstone, Salisbury and Rosebery, their advisors and opponents, is carefully analysed. The result is a history of imperialism in the making, not as it appeared to later commentators and historians, but as the empire-makers themselves experienced it from day to day. Featuring a new introduction by Wm. Roger Louis, this new edition will bring a classic work to a new generation and will be essential reading for all students of nineteenth-century history.

'Interesting, penetrating and profoundly provocative.' Asa Briggs, *New Statesman* 'If the first requirement of history is that it should be memorable, the authors of this book have succeeded.' Roland Oliver, *The Observer* About the Author Ronald Robinson (1920-1999) was Beit Professor of Commonwealth History and Fellow of Balliol College, University of Oxford. John Gallagher (1919-1980) was Vere Harmsworth Professor of Imperial and Naval History and Fellow of Trinity College, University of Cambridge.