



The Blood Never Dried: A People's History of the British Empire

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George Bush's 'War on Terror' has inspired a forest of books about the new American Empire. But what about Britain's role in the world? "A People's History of the British Empire" challenges the claim that the British Empire was a kinder, gentler empire and suggests that the description of 'Rogue State' is more fitting. How many people today know about Britain's deep involvement in the opium drug trade in China, or that Tony Blair's hero Gladstone devoted his maiden parliamentary speech to defending his family's slave plantation in Jamaica? John Newsinger has written a wonderful popular history of key episodes in British imperial history. He pays particular attention to the battles of the colonised to free themselves of its baleful rule, including Rebellion in Jamaica; The Irish Famine; The Opium Wars; The Great Indian Rebellion; The Conquest of Egypt; Palestine in Revolt; 'Quit India' and the struggle for Independence; Suez; Malaya; Kenya and Rhodesia; and, Britain and American Imperialism.

The Blood Never Dried: A People's History of the British Empire Details

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Charlie says

This is a Marxist history of the British Empire, and that ideological viewpoint ought to be held in mind when dealing with this book. This is not a full history of the Empire, but it effectively amounts to a list of wrongs from the Marxist lens. It is sold as a counterpoint to so-called 'apologist' histories of the British Empire. In line with that, the author starts by castigating a well-known historians of the Empire who did not mention the Bengal famine. But during his account of the Taiping Rebellion (pages 63-65), Newsinger does not mention that the Taiping rebels brutally massacred every Manchu man, woman and child in Nanjing when they took the city. He also praises the Taiping, despite their atrocities (for a much better account of the Taiping Rebellion, see Chapter 8 in Jonathan Spence's *The Search For Modern China*) The Taiping Rebellion was not a heroic revolt as the author implies, but a catastrophe that caused 20 million deaths. That makes the author incredibly hypocritical, as he guilty of the very thing he criticized lots of other historians for. Newsinger also talks about the British burning down the Summer Palace during the Second Opium War as a great evil inflicted on China, but it is comparable to the British burning the Library of Congress during the War of 1812, something that he does not mention. If we were to judge this author by the standards he applied to others over the Bengal famine, then we must say that this author is negligent and trying to hide something.

For a balanced and more objective history of British Empire, see the books by John Darwin (one of the historians Newsinger lambasted) which are far superior to this ideological diatribe. I also recommend *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* by Lawrence James.

Barrabhoys says

Brilliant Book which brings to light the darker side of the British Empire.

Journalist1 says

My first question is how can anyone take seriously a book that fails even to get the Indian Independence Day correct? Newsinger is intellectually dishonest with a penchant for camouflaging success with failure, his faulty, revisionist view of the British Empire tells you more about the author than his subject. Here is a man who views everything through the lens of his ideology and that lens is at times rose-colored and alternatively muddy. One of the biggest concerns about his work is the lack of peer review, *The Blood Never Dried* is highly predictable, pedantic and gives the reader a twisted and toxic sense of historical reality but what can one expect from a darling of Marxism?

I am sure that American readers will lap this book up satisfying themselves that Hollywood history is the real deal. However, for the rest of us the book should be titled: 'Morton's Demon At Work' or 'How To Win Like-Minded Friends With Confirmation Bias'

Jo Murphy says

A concise overview of the history of the British Empire that builds up a devastating picture of the crimes committed by the British state. From the slave triangle, through the Irish famine, follow Britain's bloody footprints through Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The book could have been subtitled - and the role that the Labour Government has played. The point being to show how even when a government was domestically progressive at home, they were still war monger's abroad. A good overview that whets your appetite for more.

Simon says

A powerful corrective to the usual rose-tinted view of the British Empire peddled by apologists like Niall Ferguson.

Brian says

It's not often that I read a book that sickens me to the stomach. This one did. So much so that I don't really want to write a full review. Just to say that if you are interested in the British Empire you should read this book, if only as balance for the many more "traditional" accounts.

Just want to mention one thing. I always assumed the Attlee government (probably the most Left wing government the UK has ever elected) gave India and Pakistan independence on the basis of principle. I was wrong. They would have held on if they could, but it just wasn't practical due to lack of military and economic power - they had no realistic choice.

Frankly, one of the lessons from this book is that when it comes to imperialism, the record of Liberal and Labour governments is no better than that of the Tory ones. Which is quite thought-provoking in itself.

Simon Wood says

INTRODUCING THE REAL BRITISH EMPIRE

John Newsingers "The Blood Never Dried" might be subtitled as a "Peoples History of the British Empire" but it is nothing of the sort. What the reader will instead find is a fine piece of writing that rather than providing a linear history of the Empire, examines a number of historical episodes that starkly illuminate what under girded the Empires existence: brutality and violence.

The selection is from what is known as the second British Empire, that which existed after the loss of the American colonies during the late eighteenth century. The episodes examined are (1) Jamaica and Slavery, (2) The Irish Famine, (3) The Opium Wars in China, (4) The 1857-58 Rebellion (Mutiny) in India, (5) The Invasion of Egypt in 1882, (6) The Imperial Crisis subsequent to WW1, (7) The Palestine Revolt of the late 1930's, (8) The campaign for Indian Independence, (9) The Suez War, (10) Kenya and the Mau-Mau Insurrection, (11) Malaya's "Emergency", and (12) Britains relationship with American Imperialism.

Each chapter focussing on one of the subjects (as listed above) and also put the events described into a broader historical context, including many quotes from contemporary participants and observers. It also reminds the reader that what a vicious racist Churchill could be, not least in relation to Iraq (where he spoke up for gassing recalcitrant tribes) and India (where even his viceroy in India was appalled at his callous response to the Bengal Famine that cost millions of Indian lives). Those who have fond memories of Old Labour will be disturbed to discover that one area of continuity between New and Old is foreign policy. Ernest Bevin, Herbert Morrison and even Clement Attlee were quite as capable of carrying out brutal imperial policies as their Conservative opponents. Each episode also includes some commentary on how orthodox histories, and biographies, have dealt with the history that Newsinger brings to the reader, giving them an idea of the paucity and partiality of much historical writing on this subject. The only source of irritation, albeit minor, was Newsinger's pigeon-holing of every insurrection, uprising, rebellion, etc as "revolutionary".

"The Blood Never Dried" is an excellent introduction to the reality of the British Empire. It is far from exhaustive, it could easily be three or four times the size, but one that is an ideal riposte to some of the recent boosters of Empire, from Niall Ferguson (soon to revamp the history curriculum) to Tony Blair, Andrew Roberts to Gordon Brown, and all too many more. Well recommended.

Owain says

A must read for anyone with an interest in British history or the history of imperialism. Compulsory reading for everyone living in Britain (IMO). This book is jam-packed with the horrific injustices of centuries of colonial warfare, brutality and terrorism and although it misses out much from the early empire it concentrates on recent and current events. Events whose perpetrators are still with us. Which makes it incredibly relevant. I'm very much looking forward to reading other material from Newsinger.

Tom Ferguson says

I wish I had read this when I was at Uni a long time ago.
I would have opened my eyes to the true horrors of the British Empire and acknowledged the rose tinted version of British History we were fed by the Scottish education system.
Years of studying the horrors of Nazi Germany but nothing about the genocide Britain committed throughout Africa and Asia and beyond. This book lays it all out in detail.

Md. Al-Beruni says

The book is too short to describe the atrocity of British colonialism in its entirety but it managed to make the point. However, the writings betrayed the author's bias against capitalism in favor of communism. In his criticism, though justified most of the time, the writer has included some of the actions which many might consider as the right things to do.

Liam89 says

"On its Empire the sun never sets, and the blood never dried either." This withering retort to British jingoism from the socialist and radical Ernest Jones not only provided John Newsinger's book with an eye-catching title, but also tells you everything you need to know about the barbaric nature of the British Empire. The book strips away every attempt that has been made over the past fifty years to portray the Empire as a benevolent or civilising force. Beginning with the West Indian and Caribbean slave revolts of the 18th Century, and charting British imperial missions in India, China, Egypt, Kenya, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Ireland, Newsinger uses meticulous attention to detail to demonstrate how the British Empire was maintained through staggering cruelty, torture, mass-murder, extrajudicial executions, and internment without trial, and all in order to maintain the interests of the capitalist classes in London, for whom the Empire provided so much benefit. Apologists for Empire often claim that Britain provided civilisation and administrative experience to its colonies. However, these experiences only benefited the oppressed indigenous populations in the sense (as Karl Marx so presciently wrote about British rule in India) that such advances would one day enable them to facilitate the overthrow of their British masters. Compulsively readable, well-researched, and suitably outraged, this is a must for all opponents of imperialism, and all those who believe that there is any pride to be taken in having once maintained the largest empire the world has ever seen.

Phil Brett says

A superb look at the British Empire, who existence dripped with blood. Sustained by brute force, double dealing, bribery, rape and murder, it is quite shocking how barbaric the actions to support Queen/King and country have been; and I speak as someone interested in history and one not overly misty-eyed over the conduct of British History. But as it seems that there is cabal of historians, appearing in the media, who want to 'reclaim' the history of the Empire and show its 'benefits', it is important to remember the millions who were sacrificed to make Britain 'Great'. But the book isn't just about the victims of Empire; it describes the courage and bravery of people to fight against it. In India, Kenya, Ireland, indeed across the Empire, normal people consistently rose up and challenged those who had them in chains. If the actions of the Empire are appalling and stomach-churning, then the stories of those struggling to free themselves is inspiring.

Marcy says

Newsinger's book is definitely not an introduction to the British empire. Nor is it actually a people's history, if by people's history one means using Zinn's methodology. But just as Zinn's work helps one to see American history from a new and more honest vantage point, Newsinger's book plugs into British history and gives readers insight into British colonialism and resistance to it whether in Kenya or India or Palestine or Egypt. It's not expansive, but the book offers readers the ability to compare British interests in various contexts as well as their strategy for oppressing people and robbing them of their resources. While the people's history element is a bit muted, those whose voices are loudest in the volume are former British military men, and at times their wives or other similar types of witnesses, all of whom narrate the atrocities they committed or participated in in one way or another. For anyone interested in imperialism or British history this book is definitely a must read.

Furqan says

"Debating Imperialism is a bit like debating the pros and cons of rape. What can we say? That we really miss it?" - Arundhati Roy

Isabelle says

Arguably enlightening, and a great step back from apologist histories of the British Empire, but its not exactly extensive. It picks only the most well known British atrocities, and doesn't analyse them in any great depth. To call it a people's history is somewhat misrepresenting itself. It is still primarily concerned the actions of British officials and the overall movements they came up against. A much better example of a people's history on a similar topic would be Caroline Elkin's Britain's Gulag. Also, he writes with the kind of haughty and superior tone which is hard to take after the first few chapters.
