Professor Bernard Porter
Emeritus Professor of History
University of Newcastle, UK

Empire? What Empire?
Imperialism and British national identity c. 1815-1914

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This is very much 'work in progress' and the conclusions are meant to be tentative only – in some cases hardly more than hypotheses. It was also written without access to most of the sources, which explains the sketchy footnoting. It must not be quoted or cited without the permission of the author, who can be contacted at Bernard.porter@kajsa.karoo.co.uk

EMPIRE? WHAT EMPIRE?
IMPERIALISM AND BRITISH NATIONAL IDENTITY 1815-1914[1]

Bernard Porter

One of Britain's obvious distinguishing characteristics in the 19th century, and for fifty or so years on either side, was her empire. Britain of course is by no means alone in having been a colonial power at one time or another. Hers however was the largest overseas empire in history, by most ways of measuring it, and also the last significant empire that admitted to the name. For most foreigners, who were generally at the receiving end of this - it was *as* an empire that Britain most affected them - it was her imperial status more than anything else that determined her national identity. In recent years many Britons too have come to define her in terms of her empire retrospectively. They include cultural 'theorists'[2] who have teased imperial subtexts from the most unlikely cultural products of 19th century Britain (Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* is the most famous example), in order to show how seeped in empire the country was.[3] This is understandable. It is difficult to imagine that so huge an enterprise could not have had a profound effect on Britons' views of themselves and of their nation (or nations)[4] while it was still going on. It may also however be misleading. If we put aside the *expectation* of imperialism, we find that the empire did not need to have been anything like as pervasive as this - as essential to Britons' self-perception as a nation -

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1 This chapter draws on research for a book, *The Absent-minded Imperialists*, to be published by Oxford University Press, probably in 2004. Evidence for many of the generalisations in it will eventually be found there.

2 The 'theory' is that movements like imperialism are rooted in 'cultures'; but I have never seen this argued in a joined-up way. Hence the inverted commas.

3 See for example Martin Green, *Dreams of Empire*... [but check that he is British]. The *Mansfield Park* example comes from the more famous Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*,

4 This chapter is mainly based on English sources, but pertaining to Britishness. Contemporaries of course - including contemporary Scots - often confused the two. Other chapters in this volume deal with the relationship between the different nationalities in Britain more fully. On the question of empire, it certainly should not be assumed that the Scots and Irish were less imperially minded than the English. They are sometimes treated as victims of English imperialism (see, for example, Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*), and in some respects were, but recent research suggests that they were also more active in the imperial enterprise, as governors, soldiers, missionaries, traders and so on, than the English, per head of population. See John Mackenzie's inaugural; and two chapters in the *OHBE*. There is no sign however that this was deliberately used to meld the four constituent nationalities of Britain together, as it was, apparently, in the 18th century. See Linda Colley, *Britons*, pp.

as might be thought. This is for three broad reasons. The first is that the empire did not materially effect Britons sufficiently to make such a cultural impact inescapable. The second is that the empirical evidence *on its own* does not seem to suggest that it did. Imperial meanings have to be read into the literature; they do not leap out at one. The third is that there are other 'discourses' in British national culture besides the imperial one, some of which are clearly more significant, and are even incompatible with imperialism, properly (that is, usefully) defined.[5] Seen in context, the empire played a very minor part in Britons' sense of national identity; at least until the later years of the 19th century, when the first of these three factors changed.

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To grasp the minimal material impact of the empire on Britain before then, we need to get away from notions of empire purely in terms of power. The terms 'empire' and 'imperialism' clearly imply domination and control (certainly etymologically), but this is misleading in Britain's case. If Britain really had kept her hundreds of millions of colonial subjects in the sort of thrall that these words suggest, the empire would have required a degree of commitment to the empire on the part of ordinary Britons that certainly would have impacted on Britain domestically. In fact she never did, in most of her possessions. Colonies were acquired fairly easily, often as by-products of European conflicts, or by military forces whose superior technology enabled them to conquer large numbers of people without serious effort. Sometimes it was done by private armies. Many acquisitions did not involve military conquest at all, but fell to Britain through treaties, or - difficult though it may be to credit this - after requests from natives, or factions among them, for British protection. They were ruled minimally: with very small numbers of administrators, and relatively small armies (or coastal naval patrols) to back them up. Usually it was done through accommodation with native rulers - at the beginning of the 20th century it became known as 'indirect

[5] There is no 'correct' definition of imperialism, which can mean anything one wants it to. Some current applications of the word, however, especially by cultural theorists, are so broad as to be very blunt analytical tools.

rule' - which required some give and take. Elsewhere British and other European settlers took the strain. Britain did not always seek to impose her culture on the colonies, and indeed at the time was as often criticised by natives for that - denying 'enlightenment' to them - as for what today would be called 'cultural imperialism'. Many inhabitants of the empire could not have been aware that they were British colonial subjects at all.

This is not intended to excuse Britain's imperialism in any way, or to forget the large exceptions: notably India before and during the Great Mutiny (1857); but only to demonstrate how an empire could be won and run without involving many people back home. Including everyone who could be regarded as complicit in the imperial enterprise even marginally - missionaries most obviously, but also explorers and travellers, teachers, doctors, merchants, prospectors, speculators and the people who serviced them in Britain - probably only about 3-4% of the population, if that, was knowingly involved.[6] (Emigrants are *not* included here - another ?% - because they rarely returned or even wrote home, and so had little impact on the domestic culture. The effect of the *prospect* of emigration will be touched on later.) The empire usually cost Britain nothing in taxes. (The rule was that they had to support themselves.) Of course mill and factory workers were involved in manufacturing exports to the empire, and just about everyone in consuming its products; but there is no evidence that they were particularly aware of this. Far more of their products went to other countries. Those destined for the empire did not have this stamped on them. (Pith-helmet manufacturers must have had an inkling.) Much has been made of the fact that tea and sugar came predominantly from the colonies, but it cannot be assumed that sweet tea-drinkers were aware of this. A survey of Scottish schoolchildren in 2002 revealed that 70% of them believed oranges came from England.[7] 'Tea' in the later 19th century conjured up images of a quintessential England, not of India or Ceylon.

6 This figure is broken down in my forthcoming *The Absent-minded Imperialists*.

7 Or something like that. Find the *Guardian* cutting. Challenged at a recent seminar on my claim that people might not have known where their tea came from, I asked if anyone there knew where their green peppers came from. No-one did.

(In any case most tea did *not* come from the empire before 1850, or most sugar from the West Indies after 1870.)[8] The material ties linking the majority of the British people with the empire, therefore, were minuscule. The latter will have appeared marginal, even if it was not in reality.

It is this that must explain its remarkably feeble showing in the art and literature of the time. Jonah Raskin has described its typical rôle in Victorian novels; where

> the colonies are usually places to transfer burned-out characters, or from which to retrieve characters when they were needed. They are especially convenient for the beginnings, turning-points and endings of fiction. The plot began - or flagging interest was revived - when a character returned from abroad, and the action terminated when the characters left for the colonies.[9]

That was all. The same applies to other art forms. There were few paintings of imperial subjects, for example; no sculpture; no serious music; and scarcely any 'orientalist' buildings after the Brighton Royal Pavilion of 17??. This contrasts greatly with the situation in France. Modern cultural theorists account for this in a number of ingenious ways, which may however be unnecessary. For example: the British accepted the empire so whole-heartedly that they did not feel they needed to mention it;[10] or conspired to keep quiet about it in their literature in order not to destabilise it;[11] or were too modest to want to boast about it;[12] or referred to it in code;[13] or were not properly represented by their *literati*, who were a bunch of effete snobs.[14] (That last explanation will not do because the more 'popular' literature of the time was empire-

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8 Indian only began to supplant China tea after [date?]. European beet sugar accounted for ??% of Britain's imports, as against ??% West Indian cane sugar, in 18??. Source - Mitchell and Deane?

9 Jonah Raskin, *Mythology of Imperialism* (19??), p. 17.

10 See Patrick Brantlinger, *Heart of Darkness* (?), p. (quote in full).

11 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. (quote).

12 Richards's book on music, somewhere.

13 Green, (refce), in which 'adventure' is code for 'imperialism', and Sir Walter Scott's Scottish novels are really meant to represent India.

14 Salmon and thingy.

free, too.)[15] Here the simplest explanation really does seem to be the best. Most Britons felt that the empire was of far less significance to them, and to their sense of 'Britishness' if they had one (of which more later), than the scores of other concerns, priorities, ideals and value-systems that *are* directly and clearly reflected in their literature.

Many of them could have been almost entirely unaware of their empire for much of the 19th century, though again it seems strange to say it. One reason for this is that they did not (and here the '*literati*' critics are right) read or write the texts that the cultural theorists believe encapsulated and transmitted the imperial assumptions of society as a whole. The latter *were* unrepresentative. Even if they were instinctively imperialist, it is wrong - even élitist and condescending - to assume that the mass of their non-readers meekly followed in their train. (It is worse, of course, to hold that the masses simply do not need to be *counted* in any assessment of the culture of the age.) Working-class people, for example, who made up 70-80% of the population then, generally lived parochially, not venturing outside their own districts; read no newspapers, or else entirely different newspapers from the other classes, which hardly mentioned the empire, even those produced by the middle classes *for* them (we shall see why later); read entirely different novels, either old classics or 'penny dreadfuls' about (British) sex and crime; were never lectured to by missionaries, another possible source of imperial indoctrination; and never saw a black face in their lives: for it is worth remembering that scarcely any British colonial subjects ever appeared in Britain then, except in ports and (occasionally) side-show entertainments. Imperial awareness will have increased in the train of big events like the Indian mutiny and the Jamaica rebellion of 1865, but certainly not universally, or for very long, or in a way that necessarily engendered sympathy for the imperial cause. Some radical workers identified with the Jamaican rebels.[16] It is always of course difficult to prove a

[15] Children's adventure books, for example, were often given exotic settings (examples: *Coral Island*, etc.), but rarely *colonial* ones. (Exceptions.) It really is amazing that there were no popular Indian novels before Kipling. The only possible exception is (that nook about the Thuggees).

[16] Cite examples from popular weekly newspapers.

negative, or even a minimum influence; but there really is very little evidence - from working-class memoirs of this period, for example - that the empire impinged on most Britons' consciousness to any significant degree, or even at all. Middle-class accounts, emphasising the ignorance of the working classes about these larger events, point the other way.[17]

The empire certainly did not impinge through the formal teaching the majority of the population received in their schools. This is of crucial importance, if it is true that national identities are generally constructed in the schoolroom, deliberately or otherwise.[18] The way this is usually done is through History, Geography, Literature and Civics. The last two can be ruled out entirely in 19th century Britain's case. English literature was never a school subject, probably because it was not considered sufficiently utilitarian. This contrasts with the European continent.[19] In the so-called 'Public' and grammar schools Latin and Greek literature were taught instead. 'Civics' does not appear in curricula under any name until well into the 20th century, though it may be implied in some of the classical Roman literature - Cicero *et al* - that Public schoolboys were given to translate. The latter's typical syllabus, incidentally, could be said to carry an imperial function, but not a particularly 'national' one. It taught boys (always boys, of course) how to rule. We shall return to this in a moment.

Geography and History had a place in some 'middling' school curricula. Usually the books written for this market - always privately: the State took no part in this - implied a certain view of British (or English) nationality, but with the empire playing very little part in it. Colonial events were treated subordinately to the main theme of most History books, which was the evolution of individual liberties in Britain from

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17 Cite Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown at Oxford*, p. ; and others? The empire is hardly ever mentioned in working-class memoirs from this period, though there may be special reasons for this: see below, fn... Again, cite my forthcoming book for evidence for other claims here, e.g. on the non-imperialism of the working-class weekly press.

18 See Edward Said, *The Importance of Education for Democracy*, lecture given in Gothenberg in 1997 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Stockholm, 1998), p. 8.

19 Eng. Lit. never appears in school syllabuses, except in the form of snippets to teach reading. Quote from ?1931 memoir on absence of Eng. Lit. in schools before 1900; also Matthew Arnold earlier, contrasting the Continent.

the 17th century on. Typically they were added to the ends of chapters: 'by the way, Raleigh founded a colony, too'. Many accounts were critical, especially of the early American colonists, the Chinese and Afghan wars, and the rule of the East India Company. Exceptionally these textbooks expressed pride in Britain's *settlement* (or 'white') colonies, but seen simply as extensions of Britain's native liberties overseas. To this end they usually glossed over the fate of the indigènes. Australia and British North America were depicted as virgin territories, fair game therefore for enterprising Britons. No imperial *rule* was (supposedly) involved. Even the patriotism implied by this was ambivalent. Settlement colonies were portrayed as refuges for those oppressed by tyrannical governments, or a repressive economic system, at home. The upper classes saw them as dangerously democratic. When they were admired, it was usually in tandem with the United States, with little distinction being made between them: both represented Britain's 'daughters'; which suggests that it was not the imperial (control) *aspect* of them that inspired people's pride. The same was broadly true of Geography texts, which rarely even mentioned, in describing extra-European countries, which of them were part of the empire and which not.[20] They were also incidentally - though this does not necessarily bear on imperialism - noticeably non-racist, using 'racism' in its strict sense.[21] Pupils were explicitly taught that differences in 'civilisation' - another matter - simply indicated different stages of human 'progress'. As if to emphasise this, most History textbooks began their narratives with the ancient Britons, often with illustrations showing them in primitive garb. This was almost certainly where the children who read these texts first got their idea of 'savagery' from: from pictures of themselves two thousand years ago, rather than from representations of a geographical 'other'. The implication of this of course - quite often spelled out - was that other peoples were as capable of 'progressing' as the British. This contrasts with certain other countries' textbooks, even non-imperial countries', which are far

[20] Refer again to forthcoming book.

[21] 'Racism' means a belief in ineradicable ethnic differences. Those who look down on other cultures - as many British did - are not racist if they hold that cultural differences are the result of environment rather than biology. A better word for them would be 'culturist'.

more explicitly racist.[22] It is difficult to imagine the young readers of these texts gleaning from them a view of the empire as a special or particularly admirable part of their national identity.

But in any case those readers were very few. The textbooks were for a small minority. Scarcely any 19th century children were taught any History or Geography at all in their schools. We have seen that this was the case in the Public schools. 'I knew all about Heliogabalus', wrote one Old Harrovian of his education in the 1870s, 'but nothing at all about Peel.'[23] Any modern history studied there had to be in the pupils' own time (at Harrow they were sometimes set vacation essays in it), or at 'cramming' establishments, if they needed it, for example for the Indian Civil Service exams. (Texts targeted at *these* pupils were exceptionally imperialistic and racist.)[24] At the other end of the social scale the curriculum usually consisted of reading, writing (sometimes not even that) and arithmetic, supplemented by practical skills, like sewing for girls, and moral education, initially from the Bible but then increasingly, as the century wore on, in 'political economy', which was the contemporary name for free market ideology. (Presumably the Good Book was felt to be unsound on property.) History and Geography squeezed into some elementary school curricula from the 1860s onwards, but as voluntary options only, not *funded* by a system that only rewarded schools for exam successes in the 'three Rs', and studied by only about 10% of pupils as late as the 1890s.[25] This may make the British 19th century education system unique. American and most continental European schools at this time regarded it as part of their function to teach 'patriotism' explicitly. British schools did not, in

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22 Cite Swedish PhD thesis on image of African in Swedish school Geography texts, far more influenced by 'scientific racism' than their English equivalents. I'm told that Swedish history books *never* begin with accounts or pictures of the original Swedes as savages (Anna-Li: get refce from her). This prompts the thought that racism may have been more virulent in non-imperial than in imperial nations; though it should also be pointed out that Sweden did have - apart from Finland - one small overseas colony at this time, San ???? in the West Indies, acquired in 17?? and sold to the French in 187?; and that as yet no proper comparative study has been made in this area.

23 Check the quote and school, and cite ref.

24 Reference to that chap writing in the 1850s.

25 Check this, and cite refce.

any way. If they did not seek to encourage love of country, it is difficult to see where love of the empire, or even awareness of it, could come in.

This was not accidental, but deliberate. Working class children were purposely *excluded* from a sense of national or imperial identity. There were three main reasons for this. The first was idealism. The more advanced liberals in the middle of the 19th century regarded any kind of nationalism (including patriotism) as anachronistic and potentially dangerous. It was what they put wars down to. Schoolbooks occasionally explicitly warned against excessive patriotism for just this reason: enjoined their readers to respect other nations and cultures, and other nations' *heroes*, even those that had been Britain's enemies; partly, as one early Victorian book of instruction for 'the people' put it, because they might just be right and Britain wrong.[26] The world of the future would be one in which national barriers would gradually be eroded away, under the influence of expanding free trade, or what today we call globalisation (which was of course invented by the Victorians); culminating in a utopia in which only free individuals and their relations with one another would really count. Patriotism therefore was *passé*; except, of course, in the sense of the pride Britons could take in discovering this first, and spreading it world-wide. Could *this* be called 'imperialism'? In any event it was a powerful ingredient in some Victorians' conception of their national identity. It may not have been a main reason, however, why they did not want to teach patriotism to their lower orders.

A better reason (certainly for cynics) is that patriotism was generally associated with radicalism, in the first three-quarters of the 19th century at least. This went back to the French revolutionary years. Patriots were the native people of the country, the 'Anglo-Saxons' (Celts and Danes got missed out of this account), as opposed to its governing classes, which by patriots of this ilk were associated with - and this is what made History in particular a sensitive subject - their Norman invaders of 1066. It was only later, and with difficulty, that patriotism became expropriated by the political

26 *Chambers's Information for the People* (I think): get vol. and page.

Right. Before then it was more likely to be subversive of the social order than otherwise. The third reason for downplaying patriotism was linked to this. It was that it implied a common identity, or citizenship. It is difficult to conceive of 'national identity' in any other way. It clearly had this implication in characteristically 'patriotic' countries like France and the United States. The British ruling classes were chary of this. To them citizenship may have suggested revolution - '*aux armes, citoyens*'. It certainly suggested a sort of equality: that they and the classes 'beneath' them *shared* something. But the upper classes neither believed this, nor needed to. They saw themselves as fundamentally different from the other classes, which was what entitled them to rule. This difference, in fact, was crucial to the way British society was constituted in the 19th century: on the basis of each class's performing a distinct rôle within it, and attached to the other classes in terms of its obligations towards them, rather than by any sharing of an identity. The lower classes obeyed the upper classes, the uppers served the lowers. (The middles looked after themselves.) Hence the radically different systems of education provided for each class, amounting to a kind of apartheid; with the major socialising function of each being directed to this. Elementary schools taught discipline, obedience, sobriety, honesty; public schools superiority and *noblesse oblige*. That was how the classes were kept together. A common patriotism risked dissolving this adhesive. This was why Britons were - still are, technically - 'subjects', not 'citizens', as the more patriotic Americans, French and most other European nationalities, for example, were and are.

This is not to say that British people could not have a sense of national identity in the 19th century; only - first - that it was less important than other kinds of identity; second, that it was not overtly *taught* them; and third, that it was likely to be *different* according to which class - and also, but to a lesser extent, which religion, region and gender - they belonged to. Each class conceived of 'Britishness' in a totally different way. The upper classes saw it in feudal, rural and somewhat militaristic terms, with the 'English gentleman' as its bedrock. (That is what the Public schools existed to

mould.) The British were leaders and rulers, supported by a peasantry that knew its 'place'. The middle classes saw 'Britishness' in terms of the liberties that their class had won from the upper classes, typified by the independent yeoman and his urban equivalent. The working classes regarded it either radically and democratically; or else with distaste. It was almost as though they lived in different Britains: as in a way they did. There was no single conception of British national identity in the 19th century, in other words, but several, none of them 'dominant', and some of them even incompatible. As well as this, none of these conceptions of 'Britishness' was particularly important to most of those who adhered to them. People were certainly not 'British' above everything.

These different positions were mirrored in the classes' views of the empire, and of the rôles it played in their senses of identity. The ruling classes - generally speaking: of course there were exceptions - were particularly attached to the empire they *ruled*, mainly India, in a way no other class appears to have been. They were much less attached to the settlement colonies (and the USA) for reasons mentioned already. That however was the empire the middle classes most took to, but because it exemplified other British values, like liberty, than the 'imperial' ones, as we have also seen. They regarded India with embarrassment. The vast majority of workers appear to have taken little notice of either. India's rulers and exploiters were, after all, their rulers and exploiters too. The use of Australia as a penal colony until 1868, mainly for lower-class law-breakers and dissidents, prejudiced them against the colonies of settlement. Even voluntary emigration was mainly regarded as an escape from the poverty enforced on them by their own country, and the middle classes' advocacy of it resented as a means of getting rid of them: which by and large it was. The empire *quâ* empire, then, was likely to have figured prominently and positively only in the upper classes' sense of their national identity. And because of their small numbers and their alienation from most of their fellow countrypeople, *their* sense of national identity was not a truly national - nation-wide - one.

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Towards the end of the 19th century the situation that gave rise to this *non*-imperial national consciousness changed. At the time some people thought that imperialism itself was 'new' then. Of course that was not so. Britain had already accumulated nearly all the colonies she was ever to possess before 1890. She may however have become more nationally imperial*istic* after then, in the sense that more Britons came to terms with their empire, and consequently presumably were able to incorporate it into their idea of Britishness. That was certainly what many pre-1890 imperialists hoped would happen. There were two main reasons for this. The first was that the empire appeared to be coming under threat now, from powerful and aggressive powers which heretofore had kept out of the imperial race. Germany was the main offender. That meant (thought the imperialists) that the empire needed positive popular backing, in order to survive. If not, claimed the Liberal-Imperialist Lord Rosebery in a preface he contributed to a new school Geography textbook designed to correct the prevailing ignorance of the empire among schoolchildren, the latter was 'doomed'.[27] The second reason was domestic. Britain was changing too. She was democratising. Parliamentary reform acts in 1867 and 1884 had quadrupled (?) the electorate, reaching deep into the working class. Socialism was on the rise again, after thirty years during which it had been virtually comatose. The workers were showing signs of no longer knowing - or being content with - their 'place'. This threatened the whole structure of society. One solution was to try to get them to transfer their main allegiance from their class (or whatever) to their country; in other words, to use patriotism as a means of social control. This was where imperialism came in. If the 'people' could be given pride in that, persuaded that they and their 'betters' shared a common interest in it, it might have the effect of killing two ominous threats - to the existing social order and to the empire - with one stone.

[27] Parkin...

Hence the deluge of imperial propaganda that was directed at the population at large in this period; which has been taken as proof of the extent and depth of imperial feeling among that population, on the grounds that it *must* have been overwhelmed by it, but could also of course be taken to indicate the opposite: if the people were so sound imperially, why bother to propagandise them so much? The forms it took have been described in detail in John Mackenzie's path-breaking *Imperialism and Propaganda* (19??), and the Manchester University Press 'Studies in Imperialism' series - also edited by Mackenzie - that grew from that. They ranged from great colonial exhibitions - the first held at [Earl's Court?] in 1887 - through to cigarette cards and illustrated biscuit tins. The new sensationalist popular press - especially the unprincipled and highly jingoistic *Daily Mail* - helped. Between 1881 and 1902 there was a steady stream of colonial triumphs and fiascos for it to feed on, and to keep the empire in the public eye. Schools were specially targeted by the propagandists, with new overtly imperialistic History and Geography books being written for them, featuring the early empire builders as heroes for the first time rather than rogues; cheap world maps with the empire marked in red provided to hang in their classrooms, often free; and a vigorous campaign, started up in ?1904, to mark one day each year (May 23rd) as an 'Empire Day' half-holiday. A new explicitly imperialistic boys' literature (GA Henty is the best-known author), and an only slightly less explicitly imperialistic boys' quasi-militaristic movement (the Baden-Powell Boy Scouts, ?1911), bolstered this outside the school gates. On quite another level, of course, there were authors like Kipling and Conrad, and composers like Elgar and Sullivan, infusing an *obvious* imperial awareness into British 'high' art for the first time. (No more disguises.) All this made the likelihood of the empire's entering into people's sense of their British national identity far greater after around 1890 than before.

There are however difficulties with this. Studies of imperial propaganda alone, and from what one historian has called the 'supply end',[28] may exaggerate both its extent and its impact on the 'market' it was aimed at. Imperial literature for example constituted only a minute proportion of the total literary production of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and was mostly produced by foreigners. (Conrad was Polish; Kipling more Anglo-Indian than English.) There is almost no 'serious' music from this period, or painting or sculpture, based on imperial themes. The cultural establishment of the time was very sniffy towards those works of art that were. Elgar, Kipling, and - on the painterly front - Lady Elizabeth Butler all suffered from this aesthetic snobbery, in Elgar's case unfairly.[29]

On a more popular level things looked little better. In the field of popular culture 'jingoistic' music-hall songs were rare and transitory, and imperialistic ones, properly so described (for 'jingoism' need not have anything to do with empire),[30] even more so. Only a minority of children's books were on imperial or empire-related themes, and several authorities have suggested that boys read Henty's novels, for example, mainly for the adventure, and were impervious to the ideology.[31] The same could be said of 'Land of hope and glory': hummed not for its imperialism ('Wider still and wider, May thy bounds be set'), but for the terrific tune.[32] The boy scout movement did not catch on widely among working class boys, who had been Baden Powell's main target (to teach them industrial discipline as well as patriotism), and, again, was almost certainly more popular among the middle classes for the camping and games than for the imperialism. Because the latter was not particularly prominent, for fear of putting off anti-jingo parents, it is difficult to know how much of it got through. Empire day was widely resisted before the First World war, only becoming an official

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28 Patrick Dunae? Get ref.

29 Unfairly in the sense that he was not as imperialistic as he was taken to be, though he had only himself to blame for this impression. See my 'Elgar and Empire', in *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. ?? (2001), pp.

30 Insert OED definition of 'jingoism'. Also cite Jeffrey Richards here.

31 Add refs.

32 Note on its use at American graduation ceremonies, in Spanish socialist TV commercials, and as the theme song of Hammarby SK.

holiday then (unlike in the colonies themselves, where it caught on earlier: there is a case in fact for saying that colonials were always more imperialist than the British), and with the imperial content in any case diluted in those schools it was observed by, for fear of offending parents, again.[33] An imperialist plan to copy the American practice of flag ceremonies at the start of each school day was ditched on the grounds that Britons were not as *showily* patriotic, at least, as their transatlantic cousins, and that it might be counter-productive to associate the national symbol with hated school.[34] The State always resisted calls to prescribe patriotic or imperial subjects in the school curriculum, holding that it was not part of government's function to tell teachers what to teach. If anything its advice ran counter to this.[35] The new History and Geography textbooks were rarely imperialistic *enough* for the more zealous imperialists of the day (we shall come on to the reason for this in a moment), and in any case most History teaching, though it took off in the 1900s, apparently either stopped at the Tudors, before the empire had really got going, or else consisted merely of memorising the dates of kings and queens. The most visible and notorious expressions of popular imperialism from this period were the demonstrations that took place in London and elsewhere in 1900 to celebrate the reliefs of Mafeking and Ladysmith in the Anglo-Boer war; but these certainly indicated no general enthusiasm for the empire, or even the war, as against a particular military 'escape' (not even a victory), or perhaps just a love of demonstrating; and were never repeated in any case. Authors of working-class memoirs covering these years are generally surprisingly silent on this, the greatest of all Britain's colonial wars since the 1850s, except to remark occasionally on how *little* it affected them, or how *they* managed to resist the blandishments of the imperialists. That is the other side of the picture. (There is more similar evidence where this comes from.)[36] It suggests that, even in this 'new imperial'

33 Article in Mangan book.

34 *Hansard* reference.

35 Refer to 1904 *Suggestions* already I think cited above.

36 Much of it contained in Richard Price's classic *An Imperial War and the British Working Class* (197?), many of whose findings have stood the test of time.

age, there may still have been a reluctance in many quarters to define Britain imperially.

This was what many contemporary imperialists feared. They distrusted the schools in particular. In 1885 the pioneering imperial historian and propagandist JR Seeley was still hoping for the day when, as he put it, ‘one may mention the name of England’ (in secondary schools) ‘without raising a laugh’.[37] In 1907 Lord Meath - the leader of the Empire Day movement - related how when he had recently asked a group of school leavers to put up their hands if they had ever heard of the Indian mutiny, only one hand was raised.[38] Imperialist teachers groused about not being able to find imperial maps and books to teach with.[39] This was a common complaint of imperial zealots. Kipling, for example, was ever voicing it. In 1911 he co-authored a History book himself to fill the gap. (It sold well, but was widely criticised by the teaching profession for its blatant prejudice.)[40] The same line continued after the First World war. Stories are legion of people returning from the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley having learned nothing about the colonies, or only remembering their funfair rides.[41] In 1931 the chairman of the Empire Day movement was still bemoaning the fact that 'there are... many dark corners in Great Britain, especially in the industrial areas, where the rays of our Empire sun have not been able to penetrate'; and this 'in spite of unremitting efforts' by propagandists 'for a number of years'.[42] This does not sound good from the imperialists' point of view. They were much less confident, certainly, of the ubiquity and solidity of imperial feeling in the country than some historians - and even more cultural theorists - are today.

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37 JR Seeley, ‘Our Insular Ignorance’, in *Nineteenth Century*, 1885, quoted in Deborah Wormell, *Sir John Seeley and the Uses of History* (Cambridge, 1980), 55.

38 *Hansard* reference.

39 *Hansard* ref.

40 CRL Fletcher and Rudyard Kipling, *A School History of England* (1911). Fletcher was a reactionary Oxford don. Give publication figs (from OUP); and cite Chancellor, I think, on the critics. Also David Gilmour's *Kipling*.

41 E.g. Leopold Amery, *My PoliticalLife*, vol...; and the Noel Coward quote.

42 Quoted in TR Reese, *The History of the Royal Commonwealth Society 1868-1968* (1968), pp. 156-57.

The imperialists could have exaggerated. They were instinctively pessimistic, and may have been hard to please. (Give them an official Empire Day and they would probably have demanded an Empire Week.) They may have been wrong to doubt the spread of imperial awareness, and even enthusiasm, in Britain from the 1880s and '90s on. That clearly happened. Few of the factors that had inhibited this before then still remained. Britain was more urbanised, with an enhanced media, so news travelled faster. The visible signs of empire were far more ubiquitous. Imperial propaganda *was* deluging. The topic was politically controversial. We should probably not read too much into the silence of working class memoirs on this issue, for which there may have been special reasons.[43] Nor should we equate ignorance of the colonies with lack of support for them: indeed, a public opinion survey carried out for the government much later suggests that if anything the correlation went the other way. (The more people knew about the empire, the less likely they were to approve of it.)[44] It is almost inconceivable that many Britons could have been totally ignorant of the empire in this period, unlike before. If they had been asked to say what they understood by British national identity then - it is a shame they were not: it would have spared us all this speculation - they probably would have mentioned the empire as a component of it. Whether they would have felt comfortable with this or not, of course, is a different matter.

What imperialists suspected, however, probably correctly, was that the empire was not *central* to this. This is what they meant when they complained that there were no 'imperial' texts for schools. At first glance there seem to be plenty. The new History books of this time are full of the exploits of Raleigh and Hawkins in the Americas, Wolfe at Quebec, Clive and Hastings in India, Lawrence and [name?] during the Mutiny, Livingstone in Africa, Gordon at Khartoum, and (if they went that far),

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[43] Working-class memoirists may have been atypical: necessarily more literate than most of their workmates, for example, and usually more radical, though there are exceptions to both. Working-class memoirs were also written to describe working-class *life*, to which the South African war and other similar issues probably appeared irrelevant. Who of their readers would be interested in what they thought of these?

[44] Elaborate this, and cite the 1948 Report.

Wolseley and Roberts and Kitchener all over the place. Geography books specify what countries are British colonies, describe their governments, and list the goodies that Britain receives from them. But they do not put the empire *first*. This was JR Seeley's great complaint about British History generally in the later 19th century: that it was still mainly about domestic events, and obsessed with 'liberty'. His major work - *The Expansion of England* (1883) - had been intended to correct this. In his view the question of 'liberty' had been settled for England in the 17th century; thereafter the significance of Britain lay in her rôle in the wider world. That was how British history should be taught. But it was not. (Seeley's influence has been much exaggerated in this respect.) Even at his own university (Cambridge) imperial and diplomatic history were subordinated to 'constitutional' history for at least another eighty years.[45] So far as popular history was concerned, the other JR - Green, the liberal author of *A Short History of the English People* (1874) - consistently out-sold Seeley.[46] His version continued to dominate the schoolbooks, too, and indeed was often plagiarised by them. More empire was added to this (Green had already found some place for it), but without altering the main plot. It was presented as stemming, still, from Britain's love of peace and liberty, and her wish now to spread these to others, rather than for its own sake. This involved some monstrous perversions of the true historical picture; but the significant point is that these perversions needed to be made. Young Britons were not taught to take pride in their empire *per se*, but in the other national characteristics it exemplified. It was those other features - freedom, toleration, moderation, compromise, 'progress', pacifism (unless war was 'forced' on them), and the 'St George' thing: protecting the weak - that dominated most images of 'Britain' (or England) still.

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[45] Ronald Hyam, in '[Title]', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol.? (200?), pp...., points out that the Cambridge lectures that later became *The Expansion of England* were only delivered in one of Seeley's ?16 years as Regius Professor there; and that imperial history first had a discrete course devoted to it as late as ?1946. In my time at Cambridge the 'Expansion of Europe' course was regarded - certainly in my college - as a refuge for dum-dums, who could not cope with the more cerebral alternative, which was the 'History of Political Thought'.

[46] Give the sales figures of each of them.

Even then those images probably continued to vary according to people's *class*. This was inevitable. The differences that had been so deeply embedded between groups of people by a hundred or more years of social segregation in 18th and 19th century Britain were not going to be erased by mere airy[47] appeals to imperial patriotism; especially when those had come so late in the day, seemed to be so much on the ruling classes' terms (see the statue/pedestal metaphor cited in Peter Yeandle's chapter of this book),[48] and were unaccompanied by any genuine idea of a common citizenship. In the immediately pre-First World war years, in fact, the gulf between the classes in Britain grew deeper and more threatening than at any time since the Chartists, with a spate of national strikes in basic industries that some feared (or hoped) would culminate in revolution. That was a poor showing for twenty or thirty years of trying to bind the classes together through imperial loyalty. They still inhabited different nations. Each class felt differently about the country it inhabited. 'The ordinary intelligent workman citizen,' wrote a future Labour prime minister at the beginning of the First World war, 'has a conception of his country, her traditions, her honour... different from that of the average diplomat.'[49] There was no such thing, therefore, as a sense of British national identity before 1914: not one, that is, which was truly national, rather than what one or other class would have liked to have seen national*ised*, but never was.

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Imperialists were probably right to be dissatisfied with this. Though this cluster of values (freedom and so on) did not exclude the empire from concepts of 'Britishness' - that was at least one good thing - it subordinated it in a way that could be dangerous later on. Persuading people that their empire was tolerant and libertarian, for example,

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47 Insert something here (in the fn, not the text) on 'social imperialism', from Semmel and Searle; intended to be a way of adhering the workers to the empire more materially, but unsuccessfully. Labour and the 'New Liberals' welcomed 'social imperialist' support for the 1906-11 reforms, but these did not produce the tit-for-tat expected by the imperialists: military conscription, for example, or even tariff reform.

48 Supra or infra.

49 JR MacDonald, *War and the Workers* (n.d.), p. 14.

may have helped attach them to it, but also ran the risk of alienating them from it if the tolerance and liberty were compromised. We can see the results of this in the outcries that imperial atrocities like the Amritsar massacre and aerial bombing in Iraq provoked in Britain between the Wars; and also in the extraordinary lack of domestic resistance to decolonisation from the 1940s on. If the empire had been central to most Britons' feelings of national identity in those years, this would not have happened. It was because it was absent for most of the 19th century, and then marginal thereafter, that the majority of Britons were able to cope with the loss of their empire, far more easily than later mythology maintains.

Bernard Porter is Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Newcastle, and author of The Lion's Share. A Short History of British Imperialism 1850-1995 (3rd edn., 1996).