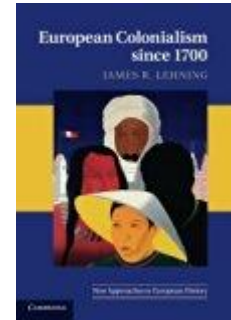


**James R. Lehning.** *European Colonialism since 1700*. New Approaches to European History Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. xi + 310 pp. \$27.99, paper, ISBN 978-0-521-74171-2.



**Reviewed by** Jacob Ivey (West Virginia University)

**Published on** H-War (March, 2015)

**Commissioned by** Margaret Sankey (Air University)

James R. Lehning's *European Colonialism since 1700* provides a comprehensive introductory survey of the complicated topic of European colonialism from 1700 to decolonization. Tracing the growth, maturity, and decline of European empires, and their impact on both the colonizer and the colonized, Lehning has produced a well-rounded survey text for undergraduates, graduates, and scholars alike. Systematically moving through the European empires of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, Lehning delivers detailed accounts of the various forms of colonial rule from the French, British, Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and even Russian perspectives. Consistently, Lehning emphasizes the links between the colony and the metropole, and highlights the stark contrasts and similarities that existed in all forms of European colonial rule during this period.

Lehning attests that his approach is a stark deviation from older accounts on the topic, as he moves beyond political, economic, and diplomatic history, and incorporates constructs of gender, race, class, and nationalism into his wider narrat-

ive. He presents the topic “not as the inevitable growth and decline of European empires but as a series of changing relationships” (p. 11). Lehning rightly summarizes the complicated historiographic trends that have encompassed imperial history from the end of colonialism itself, giving emphasis to the growth of world history and the “cultural turn” that continues to impact the discipline. By focusing on the themes of contingency, conquest, resistance, and collaboration, the history of European imperialism since 1700 is presented as a combination of numerous interactions that varied geographically and temporally during this period of European rule.

The scope of the work is immense. The author first provides analyses of the colonial systems of each European state involved, moving from the Atlantic to Oceania and Asia to Africa and the Middle East. Lehning then presents a deeper analysis of the impact of empire on Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, highlighting the importance of missionary activity, the understanding of human rights and slavery, the racializ-

ation of society, and even the popularization of imperialism in Europe. Such an analysis creates a clear understanding of the connectivity of empire, and the progression from the philosophes of the Enlightenment to the Social Darwinists of the Victorian period is clearly evident.

Problems do exist, however, regarding some details and examples within the work. While India is given primacy in Lehning's analysis of British policy in Asia, very little attention is paid to China during the nineteenth century, as China is used as an introduction for British India and a periphery to French Indochina. Such an omission is understandable given the enormous details Lehning provides about legal reforms and the implementation of British rule in India as well as the overall breadth of the book. Similar problems exist in the margins of South Africa, where Lehning presents the Zulu state as the major obstacle to British rule in the region, but gives little emphasis to the Xhosa chiefdoms. He rectifies this issue by including Richard Price's *Making Empire: Colonial Encounters and the Creation of Imperial Rule in Nineteenth-Century America* (2008) in the "further readings" section; Price's study is a more comprehensive examination of the problems of British rule over the Xhosa on the Cape Frontier in the first half of the nineteenth century.

A more troubling complaint is Lehning's use of the term "tribe" when referring to Africans during the colonial period. Though sadly typical for many non-Africanists, the use of "tribe" instead of "ethnic groups" goes against Lehning's goal of reinforcing the idea that African history "must begin not with the first footprint of Europeans on Africa" (p. 162). Another problematic omission involves the use of indigenous people in the implementation and rule of these colonial states, particularly in Africa. Though indigenous rulers are presented as an important component of indirect rule, they are only briefly presented as an "invented tradition" in some parts of the European empires. Some mention is given to the colonial troops

used during the Great War, including rightly the hope some participants had "for concession of colonial autonomy and citizenship" (p. 254). However, more detailed information and analysis on indigenous military and police during the period of colonial rule would have greatly strengthened the scope of Lehning's argument, and provided a welcome avenue for further readings from works like David M. Anderson and David Killingray's *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority, and Control, 1830-1940* (1991) and Killingray and David E. Omissi's *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers c. 1700-1964* (1989).

Despite these problems, Lehning's work is one of the few examples of a near-complete analysis of the complex parameters of European colonial conquest and rule that takes into account the growing complexities of the historiography, including the scope of gender, race, and concepts of freedom and citizenship in European colonial rule. Any omissions or problems with the narrative details are likely the result of this attempt to create such an expansive and inclusive account of the study of empire.

Lehning's final example of colonial rule, Médard Aribot, an artist from Martinique whose work was a centerpiece of the *Guerre du Diamant* in 1925, is a fitting vignette that provides deeper relevance to his overall argument. By looking at the minute and extrapolating it to a wider understanding of imperial history, Lehning acknowledges the "inability of narrative from exploration and conquest to high imperialism and then decolonization to contain the many aspects of those parts of the global past" (p. 301). This study provides a wonderful introduction to overcoming that inability, and offers a starting point for students to develop a more complete understanding of the topic of European imperialism.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at  
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

**Citation:** Jacob Ivey. Review of Lehning, James R, *European Colonialism since 1700*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. March, 2015.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=43086>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.