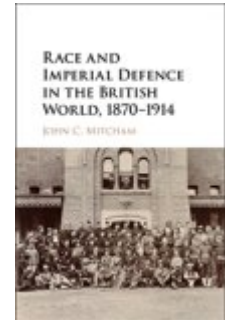


**John C. Mitcham.** *Race and Imperial Defence in the British World, 1870–1914.*  
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John Mitcham's *Race and Imperial Defense in the British World, 1870-1914* is an important contribution to the military, diplomatic, and cultural history of the British Empire. While previous works on the British world have emphasized migration, race, and gender, Mitcham emphasizes the vital element of military preparedness. He usefully integrates a wide variety of sources to analyze popular and official attitudes toward imperial defense in both Britain and the Dominions in the pivotal decades leading up to the First World War.

Chapters follow a thematic yet roughly chronological pattern exploring important aspects of the defense relationships between Britain and the colonies of white settlement. Chapter 1 explores the concept of Britishness in the late nineteenth century by synthesizing recent literature on the subject. Chapters 2 and 3 offer interesting perspectives on the cultural symbolism of the defense arrangements between Britain and the Dominions. With fears of political, strategic, and moral decline running rampant in the fin de siècle,

the self-governing colonies took on an increasingly important cultural role. The Dominions were seen as a valuable resource for the mother country to draw upon—as the metaphorical young cubs of the British lion that could defend the realm in case of attack. This assessment was especially true of popular attitudes towards the empire, but as time went on policymakers gradually began to accept this position as well.

Chapters 4 through 7 examine the evolving defense relationship between Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and (following the South African War 1899-1902) South Africa. Whereas previous scholarship has emphasized an increasingly powerful Dominion sense of nationalism and autonomy, Mitcham stresses the strengthening of the imperial bond in a number of ways. Eschewing formal military agreements, Britain and the Dominions relied on pageants, Imperial and Colonial Conferences, inspections, officer exchanges, and joint military planning to forge a pragmatic and flexible defense arrangement. Mitcham also points out that informal organiza-

tions such as the Boy Scouts were designed, at least in part, to sustain a common Britannic identity and prepare the empire for a future (and increasingly likely) war. All of this was done while conciliating Dominion autonomy. Even the development of independent navies in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, rather than creating a rupture point in the imperial relationship, created opportunities for mutual cooperation and strengthened cultural ties between Britain and the Dominions.

These chapters are the heart of the book, and represent an interesting contribution to the literature on the British World. Scholars have looked at components of this powerful sense of Britannic identity through migration, economics, race, and ideas of masculinity.[1] This work combines much of that scholarship and presents a tangible extension of it into the realm of imperial defense. Rather than seeing Dominion nationalism as in conflict with imperial interests, Mitcham stresses that “being a Briton denoted membership in a multifaceted and artificial community that, through an imagined global bond, maintained a strong semblance of unity and assured support in time of danger” (p. 231).

Race was a key feature of the defense relationship Mitcham explores in the work. Contributions to imperial defense were welcomed from white “British” imperial subjects, but never from nonwhite territories such as India (or even non-white populations within the Dominions such as the Maori). On a cultural level, many Britons rejected the idea of using nonwhite troops in a European war altogether. With the increasing threat of a Continental conflict, Dominion participation was regarded as pivotal to maintaining British predominance. Defense decisions were made based on practical military objectives, but also in relation to widespread and deeply rooted cultural considerations as well.

Throughout, Mitcham utilizes a wide variety of sources from Britain, Canada, Australia, New

Zealand, and South Africa. These include sources from officials and key imperial theorists, but also a survey of important newspapers from the Dominions and Britain. By focusing so much on the intelligentsia the work cannot claim to be representative of popular sentiments and attitudes towards imperialism. Nevertheless, these sources allow the work to examine both the “official mind” of imperial affairs as well as more popular reactions to them, facilitating nuanced interpretations of imperial activities.

The author also occasionally dips into more controversial waters, entering a few major debates in the historiography of the British Empire. In chapter 4 the author offers a segment on the debate surrounding the importance of empire to Britain, a firestorm set off in 2004 by Bernard Porter’s *The Absent Minded-Imperialists*. Mitcham argues that his sources “cannot be relied upon *prima facie* as evidence of popular opinion. But they do provide a cultural lens for analyzing the ways that many Britons viewed the empire” (p. 117). In this particular instance, Mitcham raises the question without delivering a satisfying answer or taking a strong stance. Mitcham is on firmer ground in chapter 7 as he examines defense arrangements preceding the First World War. There have been some claims that these arrangements were foisted upon the Dominions, but *Race and Imperial Defense in the British World* convincingly demonstrates that, while the self-governing nations of the empire jealously guarded their independence of action, they nonetheless “largely took it for granted that they would participate in a future Great War scenario” (p. 231).

Though the work is centered on British decision making and defense planning, the author does an admirable job giving space to official and popular sentiments in the Dominions as well. Several chapters reference key struggles in Canada and South Africa, which had large populations of white but non-British subjects. The presence of Afrikaners and French Canadians had a large im-

pact on the often hesitant nature of Canadian and South African participation in empire. Occasionally the author elides some of the nuances of particular historical events, as he does in chapter 3 when he stresses the popularity of the South African War. Though it was popular in many sectors of the empire, it caused widespread controversy with the French Canadian population in Canada, a controversy the author does not acknowledge.

The conclusion to the work examines the massive contributions the Dominions made to the war effort in World War I. Mitcham argues that this was the ultimate expression of the bond of "Britishness," and looks at the robust contributions of the Dominions in wartime. But he also suggests that participation in the First World War contributed to the gradual retreat from Britishness. Dominion soldiers in Britain during the war witnessed the urban squalor and class inequalities inherent to Britain, diminishing their enthusiasm to emulate Britain. Perhaps more importantly, the Great War contributed to a greater sense of what it meant to be Canadian or Australian. This conclusion is strangely at odds with the rest of a work that recognizes the interchangeability of nationalist and imperialist sentiments throughout the British World. The First World War certainly changed the nature of Dominion nationalism and the meaning of Britishness, but this identity was inherently protean. Dominion nationalists in Colonial Conferences throughout the interwar period demanded greater and greater amounts of autonomy, but continued to pledge their allegiance to the British Empire. Scholars of the British world have traced the end of the attachment to empire to sometime after the Second World War, when British weakness forced rapid decolonization.[2]

Taken as a whole, this work represents a valuable contribution to the scholarship on the relationship between the Dominions and Britain in the decades leading up to the First World War. Mitcham's emphasis on the cultural roots of the

defense relationship within the British world is a timely and important contribution to the scholarly literature.

#### Notes

[1]. For more on the scholarship of the British World, see James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, *The British World: Diaspora, Culture, and Identity* (Portland, OR: Cass Publishers, 2003); Philip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration, and Identity* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006); Philip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005); Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw, and Stuart Macintyre, eds., *Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Culture* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007); and John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[2]. See, for instance, Philip Buckner, ed., *Canada and the End of Empire* (Toronto: UBC Press, 2005); David Goldsworthy, *Losing the Blanket: Australia and the End of Empire* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002); and Stuart Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace: The Demise of the Imperial Ideal* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001).

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