

Imperial Emotions

Emotions are not universal, but are experienced and expressed in diverse ways within different cultures and times. This overview of the history of emotions within nineteenth-century British imperialism focuses on the role of the compassionate emotions, or what today we refer to as empathy, and how they created relations across the empire. Jane Lydon examines how empathy was produced, qualified and contested, including via the fear and anger aroused by frontier violence. She reveals the overlooked emotional dimensions of relationships constructed between Britain, her Australasian colonies and Indigenous people, showing that ideas about who to care about were frequently drawn from the intimate domestic sphere, but were also developed through colonial experience. This history reveals the contingent and highly politicized nature of emotions in imperial deployment. Moving beyond arguments that emotions such as empathy are either 'good' or 'bad', this study evaluates their concrete political uses and effects.

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Jane Lydon

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Imperial Emotions

The Politics of Empathy across the British Empire

Jane Lydon

The University of Western Australia, Perth



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For Tim, Roy and Dash, for keeping the home fires
burning.

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