

# **THE IMPERIAL CURRICULUM**

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Racial images and education in the British  
colonial experience

Edited by  
J. A. Mangan

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Volume 105

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1993

This edition first published in 2012

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada

by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-61517-4 (Set)

eISBN 13: 978-0-203-81617-2 (Set)

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-68257-2 (Volume 105)

eISBN 13: 978-0-203-80417-9 (Volume 105)

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First published 1993  
by Routledge  
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

© 1993 J.A. Mangan

Phototypeset in 10pt Times by  
Mews Photosetting, Beckenham, Kent  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Mackays of Chatham PLC, Chatham, Kent

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*  
*A catalogue reference for this book is available from the British Library*

ISBN 0-415-06883-5

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*  
*has been applied for*

ISBN 0-415-06883-5

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# Introduction

This collection of essays explores faint trails in the history of cultural imperialism as yet barely trodden. A caveat for the too demanding – space precludes geographical, conceptual and empirical comprehensiveness. It is simply not possible to discuss every colonized territory, subject people or relevant theme. Readers no doubt will have their specialist areas of interest. Some will be catered for here; some will not.

Nevertheless within the space available there is a *deliberate* diversity of region, peoples and subject. The hope here is to start a hillside of academic hares and to stimulate the fuller pursuit of enquiries into the relationship between imperialism, culture and curriculum in the belief that the past is part of the present – to a degree often unrealized: ‘The power of past images should not be underestimated. They remain impressed on a culture as a palimpsest, shaping and colouring all the images that evolve at later dates’.<sup>1</sup>

Curiously the issue of racism in British imperial education as yet has not been adequately explored in academic monographs, articles or essay collections. Increasingly, however, there is discussion of the topic in academic journals, edited works and pamphlets by, for example, Stephen Ball, Chris Mullard, Kevin Lillis and J.A. Mangan.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note the dates of the appearance of these articles and chapters. This suggests that the time is ripe for a more extensive and systematic consideration of the issue. While the literature on racism is now extensive, there are sizeable and important omissions in the many publications available. In particular, despite frequent assertions about the need to understand the historical roots of racism, no sustained attention has been paid to the role of the imperial curriculum and, within the curriculum, to the school textbook in the promulgation of racial stereotypes, the creation of ethnocentric attitudes and the ‘labelling’ of colonial peoples.

This collection of essays is the first of its kind on the topic of racism, education and imperialism and focuses on the function of education, curriculum and textbook in shaping imperial images of dominance and deference. It is a comparative historical analysis and draws on recent work of scholars from (and about) Africa, Australia, Britain, Canada, India, Ireland, Malaya (and Singapore) and New Zealand. The subject matter is new, the spread of

## 2 *The imperial curriculum*

former imperial territories is unique and the book constitutes the *first comparative analysis* of racial attitudes in the formal schooling of motherland, dominion and colony.

In addition, the book considers the issues of racial indoctrination through curricular policy and chosen textbook from the perspective of *both* colonizer and colonized. It takes account, in other words, of the view of imperialism from below as well as above; a too frequently neglected perspective.

It is hoped that the book will have a wide readership in the English-speaking world including general historians of imperialism, political historians, social historians, historians of education, historians of former dominions and colonies, anthropologists and sociologists with an interest in education and general educationalists and curriculum specialists. Above all, it is hoped that the book will be of special interest to those working in the field of equal opportunity, race relations and antiracism.

In an area of study that provokes intense reactions and strong feelings it is important to stress that the emphasis is academic not polemical. It has been rightly argued that we must guard against research on colonialism that is substantially an emotional anticolonial diatribe. This volume will attempt to examine the careful use of education, curriculum and textbook in the creation of racial images in order to explore efforts to create attitudes of dominance and deference within an imperial context. To this end open-minded scrutiny is a basic requirement. Equally it is a requirement to ensure that the coverage is culturally and regionally specific, and deals with 'local' imperial dissimilarities as well as similarities arising from a general imperial framework. In addition, contributors pay attention to the following fundamental issues: the nature, purpose and process of indoctrination, the extent of the success of this indoctrination and the extent to which it was conscious and unconscious, intentional and unintentional. This, in turn, requires a careful consideration of purpose as distinct from implementation, dissemination as distinct from assimilation and the receptivity, respectively, of colonist and colonized.

J.A. Mangan's chapter (chapter 1) deals with the general purpose of stereotypes as explanations for and justifications of racial inequality, and considers within the framework of formal education the formulation of, and rationale for, a range of stereotypes arising out of altruistic and ulterior attitudes associated with political imperatives, cultural myopia, spiritual idealism and racial prejudice.

Both Kathryn Castle and T. Lilly (chapters 2 and 3) look at images of the colonized in the school textbooks of metropolitan Britain. Castle has three aims: to examine the 'types' of Indian represented to the young Britain, to explore the self-serving nature of such imagery and the part it played in ensuring loyalty to the concept of imperialism, and to consider the formulation of image in the context of specific situations in British society, such as the Indian Mutiny, which sharply shaped racial attitudes both at the time and in later decades. Therefore she addresses the issues of both continuity and change associated with image depiction, and the extent to which it served the self-perceived

needs of imperial Britain. Lilly, for his part, reveals bias in the earliest published geographical surveys at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a bias extended into the twentieth century given the long shelf-life of school textbooks. He argues that the influence of geography in the school curriculum in terms of racial imagery, was 'widespread and lasting', and the role of the geography textbook as formulator and reflector of racial prejudice was substantial.

John Coolahan (chapter 4) begins the survey of racial imagery in the colonies and dominions. He deals with school textbooks in Ireland – Britain's oldest imperial territory. As he reveals, in the interest of unity, textbooks stressed the bonds which unite the people of the British Isles and deemphasized cultural, religious and linguistic differences (p. 55). These textbooks contrasted sharply with the insulting image of the Irish in the popular press, racialist pamphlets and political cartoons. Coolahan offers, therefore, a study of contrasts. In addition, he analyses the depiction of 'other peoples' in the school textbooks used in Irish schools which indulged freely in stereotypic images of inferiority. Finally he assesses the potency of this positive and negative imagery in socializing the young.

With Colin McGeorge (chapter 5) the focus shifts to New Zealand, Maori and Pakeha. Here, as will be seen in the next chapter on Australia, initially the emphasis in curriculum and textbook was on the development of New Zealand within the framework of the issues of race and imperialism. Past depiction of the Maori within the schools was complimentary but selective – admired images of a past and primitive heroism. Smooth assimilation of the Maori into 'Western culture' was stressed and attempted. Today, suggests McGeorge, the current proposal that the syllabus should include *taha Maori* (the Maori side of things) reveals both a complacency with past heroic depiction and a discomfort over the former concern with 'a cabinet of ethnographic curiosities' (p. 78). It should not be overlooked, argues McGeorge, that Pakeha imagery of the Maori, despite its apparent benevolence had as its fundamental purpose the legitimizing of expropriation, settlement and assimilation.

Robert Darlington and Stewart Firth (chapter 6) demonstrate both the pervasiveness and cohesiveness of the imperial message of 'a hierarchy of races' in the dominions. It reached out with some success into the Australian schools before the Great War. Subsequently in the inter-war period the message, despite some attention to pacifism and internationalism, remained largely unchanged. Australian schoolchildren learnt that what was important was the preservation and expansion of the British race (pp. 86–92). This message despite subsequent changes in educational policy, curriculum and textbook, has continuing grave consequences for the Aborigine.

Jo-Ann Archibald's view of curriculum policy (chapter 7) associated with the indigenous peoples of Canada under colonial rule, is stark and condemnatory. Formal schooling served only as confirmation of racial stereotyping. It was shot through with racist attitudes and actions which were self-fulfilling and remained racist in conceptualization and implementation until the middle of this century.

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Theodore and Anthula Natsoulas (chapter 8) argue that the history of educational provision for the African in colonial Kenya was determined by the requirements of the three European 'interlopers': administrator, missionary and settler. The interlopers' image of the African both determined and was determined by imperial needs. These needs demanded an education for the African that ensured 'cultural migration', and economic, social and political subordination. However the African resisted, and attempted to adapt, both stereotypes of native ability and rationalization of the consequent educational system.

P.G. Okoth (chapter 9) offers a discussion of the imperial curriculum in Uganda from the perspective of those 'underneath'. He sees it as both a deliberate mechanism designed to brainwash the Ugandans into discarding their own cultures and embracing 'superior' Western culture, and an ethnocentric instrument for the civilizing of the allegedly 'primitive' peoples of Africa. Racist and paternalistic curricular policies, he claims, fostered a culture of dependency, inferiority and self-doubt.

Keith Watson (chapter 10) traces the curricular policies of successive British imperial administrations in colonial Malaya and Singapore. They were policies founded on subscription to the differing perceptions of the various communities – Malays, Chinese, Indians and Europeans. Policies, curricula and textbooks had, in common, patronizing attitudes and explicit favouritism. Both were to have a lasting impact on Malay society, resulting in an absence of multiracial harmony and the creation of racial resentments. Watson scrutinizes the ethnocentric racial emphasis in imperial educational provision and discusses the consequences of this for Malayan society.

Suresh Chandra Ghosh (chapter 11) deals with the British 'superiority complex' explicit in curriculum and textbook in imperial India and its unforeseen consequences – a diet of English education among the Indians had raised 'a fighting cock' while it was expected to raise an enormous 'hen' (p. 193). He explores the nature of educational indoctrination and the unexpected influence of this indoctrination on the Indian people.

Peter Kallaway (chapter 12) is concerned with various manifestations of racism in education in South Africa: racism between the white groups (English speaking and Afrikaans/Dutch speaking) and between white and black. According to Kallaway racial stereotypes and ethnocentric myths were basic elements in the educational curricular policies of the British in South Africa both before and after the Boer War, while the Christian National Education of the Afrikaner put great emphasis on the Boer struggles and victories and their defence of their national, linguistic and cultural identity. This approach was accentuated after the Second World War in the wake of the political ascendancy of the Purified National Party. For their part, the blacks have been badly served in the writing of South African history, states Kallaway. Their task was to believe and internalize the white colonialists' myths about themselves and thus read themselves out of history. In short, the historical functions of schooling, the curriculum and textbooks were the product of white rule and aimed at establishing domination. The task for the future, he argues, is

is to provide a history syllabus 'which embraces the need for a strategy for nation-building' (p. 208).

This volume is essentially an investigation into the making and breaking of confident identities – individual and corporate; a fundamental role conscious and unconscious, it is argued here, of cultural imperialism and imperial culture. However the volume has several dimensions: it is at one and the same time an analysis of 'ruling discourse', a study of educational ideologies in action, an investigation of attempted racial socialization, a case-study of period ethnocentricity and above all an inquiry into the role and nature of imperial image-construction.

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