



INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS

---

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1838–1956: A History* by James Heartfield

Review by: Richard Huzzey

Source: *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Summer 2017), pp. 698–700

Published by: Indiana University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/victorianstudies.59.4.23>

Accessed: 17-12-2017 00:35 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*Indiana University Press* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Victorian Studies*

works that draw on their own historical heritage is an entirely different exercise than delving into the cultural appropriation of imperialist British women in the Victorian era. Youngkin's book provides scholars with a jumping off point—an opportunity to interrogate the impact of Orientalism and its temporal collapsing, as well as its overt imperialist agenda, on British women's understandings of themselves. There is much more work to be done, however, to understand better the violent imperial theft of heritage implicit in British women's writings about ancient Egyptians.

NANCY L. STOCKDALE  
*University of North Texas*

doi:10.2979/victorianstudies.59.4.22

**The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1838–1956: A History**, by James Heartfield; pp. xii + 486. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, £45.00, \$65.00.

The 1889 Brussels Conference, where the European powers carved up the African continent, took place beneath a map supplied by the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, as James Heartfield notes in this new history of that organization. The chart's delineation of slave routes also symbolized the overlapping frontiers of imperial expansion and so-called anti-slavery civilization, for which the Society came to advocate. *The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1838-1956: A History* traces the strange career of the Society, founded in 1839 by the most zealous agents of the emancipation campaign and the righteous advocates of an early end to a transitional system of apprenticeship in the West Indies.

Heartfield offers a rigorous survey of the Society's concerns, assembled from a diligent reading of their *Anti-Slavery Reporter* and other contemporary print sources. As his footnotes demonstrate, the Society used their journal to publicize concerns or government reports in a wide variety of other organs, reaching well beyond the small circle of subscribers. While the book notes long-standing debates over the motives for government action against the slave trade and slavery in 1807 and 1833 to 1838, it focuses instead on the sheer range of post-emancipation activism. This approach has the virtue of tracing the Society's wavering and contradictory views on particular crises of abolitionism and humanitarianism.

In the first decades, the pacifism of many officers, especially Quaker founder Joseph Sturge, meant that the Society opposed naval suppression of the Atlantic slave trade. Moreover, they initially supported the Confederacy against the North's aggression in the American Civil War. Heartfield's review of these wavering public professions will encourage future researchers to delve into the organization's archive and uncover the debates and networks of intelligence-gathering, which lay behind the editorial line of the *Reporter*. The Society's uneasy relationship with free trade, so far as it involved slave-produced goods, was especially complex and controversial, for example.

In many ways, however, it is this book's treatment of the later Victorian and twentieth-century career of the Society that opens up the maximum number of new avenues for investigation. Heartfield shows the ways in which the *Reporter* erratically cheered or

chided charlatans such as Charles George Gordon, Henry Morton Stanley, Leopold II of the Belgians, and Benito Mussolini; the Society looked, first, to pursue their own goals and, later, to distance themselves from ensuing scandals. In exploring the abolitionists' support for British commercial or colonial expansion, Heartfield pays particular attention to the sophistries which excused new and continuing forms of forced labor in British colonies in favor of a focus on slave *trades*.

At the time of its founding, the Society had been denounced in some quarters as a presumptive sect of fringe radicals, in contrast to the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and the Civilization of Africa (oddly referred to as the "African Institution" in this volume) (203–04). Established by Thomas Fowell Buxton, this rival group enjoyed the patronage of Prince Albert, the Whig government, and Tories, including the young William Gladstone. By the final decades of the nineteenth century, however, the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society welcomed mainstream politicians, missionaries, and retirees from the Foreign Office onto their committee. As Heartfield suggests, these personnel changes help to explain the Society's evolution from critical pressure group to responsive policy forum. Moreover, the Society started to play a role as a supporter of expanding imperial rule. David Livingstone, who witnessed the launch of Buxton's Niger expedition in 1841, embodied his expansionist goals of commerce, Christianity, and so-called civilization in the mid-Victorian period. By the end of the nineteenth century, the leaders of the Anti-Slavery Society, including the descendants of Buxton, fulfilled his mission rather than that of their own, more idiosyncratic founders.

In the twentieth century, the Society, as well as colonial governors such as Frederick Lugard, helped define the terms of early international law, distinguishing between slavery and other forms of coerced labor. The Society's 1909 merger with the Aborigines' Protection Society, the subject of Heartfield's previous book and another of the elder Buxton's projects, did not see any shift in the group's approach. Indeed, the group raised little objection to the renewed use of coerced labor as part of the imperial effort to two world wars. As C. L. R. James would note, the Society spent the 1930s justifying Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia on the basis of Italian promises to suppress the slave trade.

This book opens up a range of topics to further study, but its real strength lies in tracing the Society's pronouncements across such a long period and so many parts of the British Empire and the wider world. As a glimpse into the institutional worldview of the abolitionists, it will be very useful to Victorianists in many disciplines, including history, literature, and periodical studies, who wish to recover the Society's views on particular incidents or controversies. At times, though, this efficient summary of nineteenth-century attitudes sees the word "negroes" deployed outside of quotation marks, which—whether a typographical error or intended as mockery of Victorian racism—is regrettable (113).

By the 1950s, when the British authorities executed more than a thousand Kenyans and murdered many more, the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society avoided comment. They explained in their 1955 Annual Report that they feared embarrassing the government. The judgement stands in stark contrast to the Society's early-Victorian radicalism, as Heartfield observes, when secretary Louis Chamerovzow was at the forefront of efforts to prosecute Governor Edward John Eyre for the atrocities committed against black Jamaicans in the wake of the Morant Bay rising. This book will enhance our

understanding of the continuities of humanitarian movements and colonial exploitation in the Victorian period and beyond.

RICHARD HUZZEY  
*Durham University*

doi:10.2979/victorianstudies.59.4.23

**Africans and Britons in the Age of Empires, 1660–1980**, by Myles Osborne and Susan Kingsley Kent; pp. xii + 249. London and New York: Routledge, 2015, £100.00, £32.99 paper, \$145.00, \$49.95 paper.

**Heroic imperialists in Africa: The promotion of British and French colonial heroes, 1870–1939**, by Berny Sèbe; pp. xxi + 329. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013, £75.00, £22.99 paper, \$110.00, \$44.95 paper.

At first glance, Myles Osborne and Susan Kingsley Kent's *Africans and Britons in the Age of Empires, 1660–1980* and Berny Sèbe's *Heroic imperialists in Africa: The promotion of British and French colonial heroes, 1870–1939* seem to be two volumes with diametrically opposed aims. Osborne and Kingsley Kent purport to excavate the often-submerged “dynamics that characterized the dealings between Africans and Britons” in the period under consideration (2), while Sèbe explores the ways in which “heroes were mediated to the public of the two leading imperial powers of the time, rather than [attempting] a foray into what they consisted of” (3). Indeed, Osborne and Kingsley Kent place emphasis on foregrounding the “nuance and variety [which] characterized all of the relationships between Africans and Britons,” highlighting the internal heterogeneity of each side and the strategies so obtained (9); this is in contrast to Sèbe, who deems central “the multiple outlets through which heroes of the British and French empires were celebrated, how their reputations were made over several decades and who sustained them” in a deliberately Eurocentric frame (4). Despite these ostensible differences in perspective and aim, however, both *African and Britons in the Age of Empires* and *Heroic imperialists in Africa* share a range of features which attest to broader movements in imperial and colonial historical studies today.

Most significantly, these are two works which center their analysis on the concept of the exemplar, reproducing a form of history writing mediated through the lives, experiences, and public profiles of great men. Sèbe deliberately positions his project in this manner, foregrounding the rise to fame and ongoing influence of a select group of imperial heroes as indicative of the socio-political, moral, and ideological values prevalent in the societies of their time. Focusing on case studies including David Livingstone, Pierre Savorgnan Brazza, Charles George Gordon, Horatio Herbert Kitchener, and Jean-Baptiste Marchande, *Heroic imperialists in Africa* argues that the significance attributed to these figures can be explained both through “the public’s taste for contemporaneous ‘exemplary lives’” in England and France in the decades leading to the two world wars, and by the ways in which this singularity was manipulated in the service of contemporary politics around the nation-state, colonization, and empire in both countries (70).