

Title—Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality

Authors—Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds

Year—2008

Categories: Race, World History, Empire

Place: The World

Time: 1880-1920

Argument Synopsis:

Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds’s book *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* analyzes the formation of the concept of whiteness and the creation of the binary of white and non-white during the turn of the century using a transnational analytical framework. They set out to chart the spread of whiteness as a transnational form of racial identification. Lake and Reynolds distinguished their work from the preexisting historical work by using a transnational lens as opposed to a focus on specific nation-states. The “religion of whiteness,” was formed within the United States and the British Empire, which is the focus of the book. Lake and Reynolds argues that the conceptualization of whiteness and the subsequent concept of a white man’s country did not exist until 19th century imperialism. They use race as an analytical framework throughout the book, exploring the ever-present nature of race. The discussion of the assimilability of immigrants based on color, such in the case of Chinese and Japanese migrants to the United States and British Dominions, demonstrates the use of a racial analytical framework. Lake and Reynolds also utilize gender methodology in their categorizing of self-governance as ‘manly’ and the ‘feminine’ quality associated disparagingly with Asian immigrants.

Lake and Reynolds explore the transnational connections between the United States and the British Empire in terms of racial politics during the turn of the century. Interestingly, they demonstrate how the experience of these countries influenced each other. An example is the influence of the United States in shaping Australia’s immigration policies. There was a belief in the failure of multi-racial democracy, which was proven by the failure of Reconstruction, which encouraged the advent of the strict White Australia policy. In the realm of immigration restriction, the United States, Canada, South Africa, and Australia were very interconnected and shared the means of excluding non-whites, all making use of a literacy test for example. In the case of Australia, “Australians drew a color line around their continent and declared whiteness to be at the very heart of their national identity,”(138). By utilizing a transnational framework, the authors can illuminate connections and influences between the countries not previously explored. Lake and Reynolds use letters between the leaders of the countries and prominent scholars as evidence, such as Theodore Roosevelt’s correspondence with Charles Pearson. The use of a transnational analytical framework could be used in various other contexts to provide new insights into the interconnection of the world and how it influences specific nation-states.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- The United States and the British Empire served as the location for the formation of the ‘religion of whiteness’ during the turn of the century
- Racial politics between the British Empire and the USA shaped each other through their connections, often along the lines of immigration