

**Title—At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World**

**Authors—Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose**

**Year—2006**

Categories: British Empire, Metropolitan Attitudes, Culture, Imperialism

Place: Britain

Time: 1790-1930

Argument Synopsis:

Hall and Rose's edited collection attempts to address the impact of the empire on the British metropole from the late eighteenth century to the present. They argue that the empire was taken-for-granted as a natural aspect of Britain's place in the world and its history. The collection focuses on the period when the empire existed and was a presence in modern life, therefore not addressing the postcolonial period and the ways that empire continues to inform British life. Most of the essays are focused in the nineteenth century. As part of the move away from the binary of national and imperial history, Hall and Rose argue that British history must be transnational and do so by emphasizing connections across the empire. This collection is also a part of the movement away from the dichotomy of metropole and colony. Empire linked the lives of people in the metropole to global circuits of production, distribution, and exchange. The essays demonstrate how Britain's imperial role and its presence within the metropole shaped people's identities as Britons and informed their practical daily activities.

When the authors refer to being 'at home' with empire, they refer to being comfortable with the idea of being imperial. The everydayness of empire allowed for a potential for visibility and contestation. The imagined boundary of a metropolitan 'home' was based on a common-sense geographical history of an island nation mostly untroubled by its imperial project. Home as a concept is often associated with a sense of belonging which is central to an imperial nationalism that must maintain a boundary between metropole and colony. Hall and Rose argue that the culture of everyday life was infused with imperial nationalism structured around logics of difference that operated both consciously and unconsciously.

All of the contributors agree with Hall and Rose that one can no longer write British history without considering the British empire. The collection aims to explore the different ways that Britain's status as an imperial power became part of the lived lives of Britons. Importantly, Hall and Rose reveal that the importance of empire at home did not depend on whether Britons were consciously imperialist or if they applauded or denounced imperialism—it was simply a part of life. Across the essays, there are four general themes that substantiate the claims made in the introduction. First, the anti-slavery movement and overseas missions brought the empire home to Britons. Second, the politics of suffrage brought the empire home because they were linked to the political status of Ireland, the politics of race, and to more progressive expansions of the franchise in the dominions. Third, reading, especially literature, brought the empire home to Britain's growing reading public. Finally, the roles played by domesticity and consumption in bringing the empire home to Britons.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Empire was taken-for-granted as a natural aspect of Britain's place in the world and its history
- Culture of everyday life was infused with imperial nationalism structured around the logics of difference
- Religion, consumption, and literature were some of the routes where empire became commonplace