

Title—The Uses of Imperial Citizenship: The British and French Empires

Author—Jack Harrington

Year—2020

Categories: Migration, Citizenship, Empire, Colonialism, Politics

Place: The World

Time: 1800-1870

Argument Synopsis:

Harrington's book is a comparative study of the differences between ideas of citizen, state, and society in Britain and France. He asserts the role of empire in shaping modern understandings of citizenship in the West. Harrington examines the ways in which ideas of citizenship and subjecthood were shaped by the domination of large colonial populations, taking examples from the British and French empires. This is not an attempt at a comprehensive history of either empire, but rather an attempt to use both empires to reveal the complexities of imperial citizenship. For the purposes of the study, Harrington concentrates for the most part on French Algeria and British India. The book is focused on the first half of the nineteenth century.

The book is organized into five chapters. The first chapter sketches out the conceptual implications of understanding the history of colonialism in terms of citizenship. He argues that European citizenship was an essential element of the formation of citizenship as understood in the West. The second chapter provides a detailed example of the role that imperial rule had in shaping aspects of what it considered to be European or Western liberal ideas—specifically in the context of imperial rule in British India. The third chapter sketches a history of the formation of imperial citizenship across British and French empires, challenging the conventional accounts of the distinctions between their concepts of the citizen. The fourth chapter offers a detailed example of this joint history by examining British perceptions of the French invasion and conquest of Algeria. The British response to the French invasion of Algeria prompted reflections on the nature of imperial rule and the management of colonial populations. The fifth chapter examines some of the most important ways in which the limits of imperial citizenship were revealed; the protection granted to individuals by their government when they were abroad. Harrington examines how imperial citizenship was constituted through movement not only within but also between empires.

Harrington makes use of consular records for Algiers to see how the rights and protections of British subjects outside of British territory were enacted, especially in the context of the transfer of the territory to a fellow Christian power. Both British India and French Algeria point to the limitations of colonial settlers as carriers of European civilization. Harrington aims to provide a wide perspective on the ways in which settler colonies were a site of experimentation with European rights claiming and belonging that is complementary to the history of how national citizenship took shape in metropolitan contexts. His book questions a key assumption about the historical conditions that shape contemporary citizenship—that its origins are situated within European, largely national, regimes. His central concern is about forms of civil rights claims and aspects of colonial governance in Algeria and India.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- European-ness was itself fractured along national cultural lines
- Modern citizenship in the West has been shaped by the history of empire as much as the nation-state
- Both British India and French Algeria point to the limitations of colonial settlers as carriers of European civilization