An aerial, isometric-style illustration of a city grid. A river winds through the city, and a prominent tall building is visible in the lower right. The overall color palette is muted, with browns, greys, and reds.

# CITIES OF EMPIRE

THE BRITISH COLONIES AND THE  
CREATION OF THE URBAN WORLD

**TRISTRAM HUNT**

AUTHOR OF *BUILDING JERUSALEM*

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URBAN WORLD

TRISTRAM HUNT

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*To M.D.E.H.*

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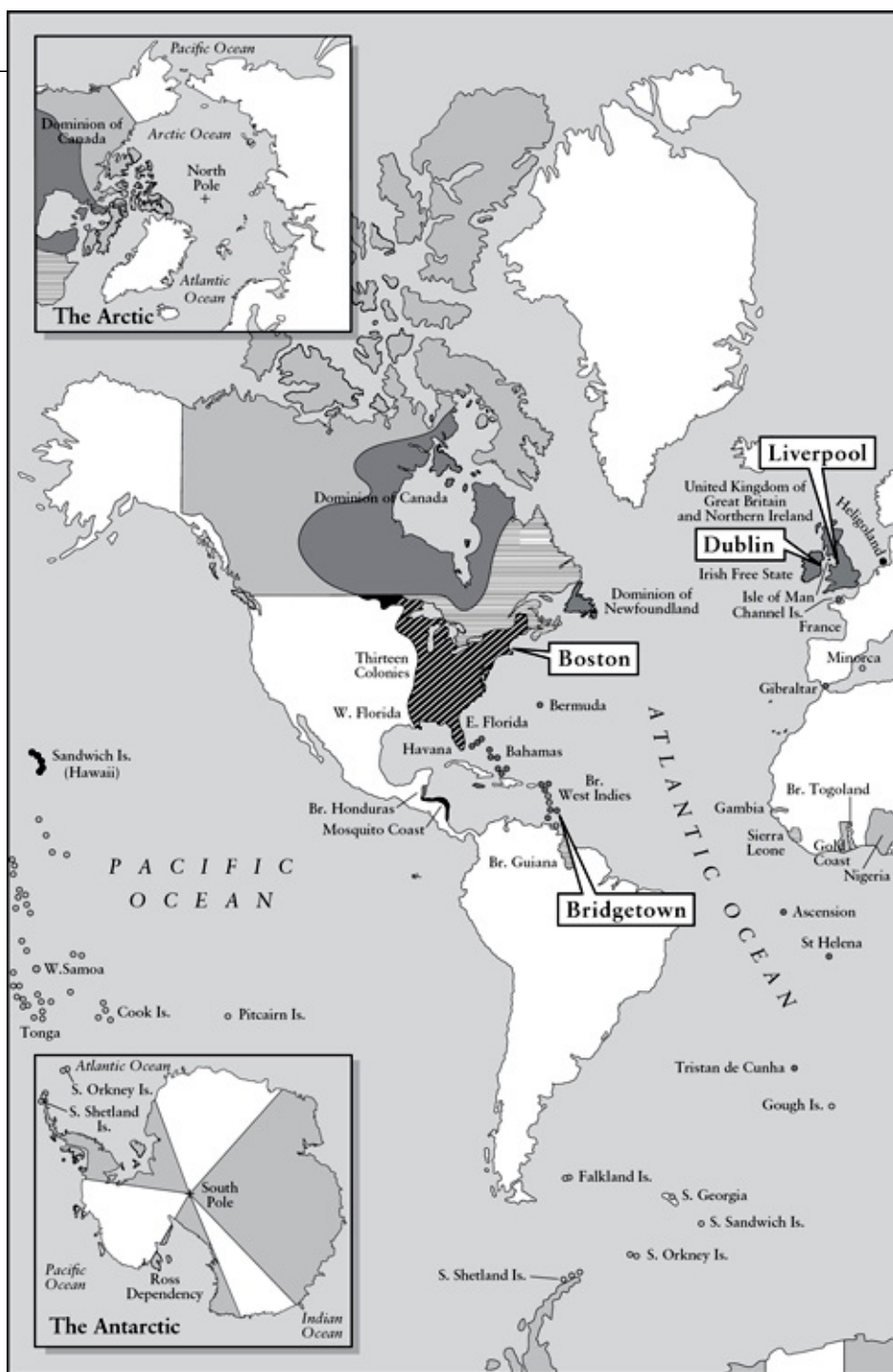
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# The Growth and Decline of the British Empire



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## Introduction

On a sharp winter's day in December 2010, the Hong Kong Association and Society held its annual luncheon in London's Hyde Park. The venue, of course, was the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, part of the Jardine Matheson group, perched lucratively amidst the billionaires' playground of Knightsbridge and all the great tai-pans of British corporate life were in attendance. However, the Association's guest of honour was not some old China hand, flown in from the Hong Kong Club, to wax lyrically about Britain's 'easternmost possession'. Instead, it was the tall, suave and studiously loyal ambassador of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency Mr Liu Xiaoming.

In syrupy diplomatese, Beijing's man in London spoke rhapsodically of the 'Pearl of the Orient' and the achievements of British business in building up the colony, and then reaffirmed his government's commitment to the vision of Hong Kong proclaimed by Deng Xiaoping: one country, two systems. Communist China would not impose 'Mao Zedong thought' on Hong Kong. Instead, it was determined to preserve freedom of speech, the rule of law, private property rights and, above all, the low-tax, free-trade model that underpinned the once-imperial city's prosperity. The future of the 'international city' was as a global finance centre and, for British companies, as a bridge to mainland China. A pleasing statement of business as usual, the message was smartly tailored to the merchant princes of the Mandarin Oriental.

Thirteen years earlier, when Britain's ninety-nine-year lease on Hong Kong came to an end, there was little evidence of such Sino-British harmony. Then, it was all tears and angst, pride and regret. At the stroke of midnight the Union Jack was lowered to the strains of 'God Save the Queen', the Hong Kong police ripped the royal insignia from their uniforms, and Red Army troops poured over the border. Britain's last governor, Chris Patten, recorded the final, colonial swansong in all its lachrymose glory: its 'kilted pipers and massed bands, drenching rain, cheering crowds, a banquet for the mighty and the not so mighty, a goose-stepping Chinese honour guard, a president and a prince steaming out of Victoria Harbour, as the Royal Marines played 'Rule, Britannia!' and 'Land of Hope and Glory', on the last, symbolic voyage of the Royal Yacht *Britannia*, 'we were leaving one of the greatest cities in the world, a Chinese city that was now part of China, a colony now returned to its mighty motherland in rather different shape to that in which it had become Britain's responsibility for a century and a half before'.<sup>1</sup>

In London, responses to the handover ran the gamut, from anguished to humbled, emblematic, in any way, of the conflicted reexamination of Britain's colonial legacy that has been underway for some years. At the shrill end of the spectrum: 'The handover of Hong Kong to China strikes many westerners as a disgrace and a tragedy,' thundered *The Economist*. 'Never before has Britain passed a colony directly to a Communist regime that does not even pretend to respect conventional democratic values.'<sup>2</sup> Historian Paul Johnson, writing in the *Daily Mail*, concurred: 'The surrender of the former colony of Hong Kong to the totalitarian Communist government is one of the most shameful and

humiliating episodes in British history.’ The scuttle from Victoria Harbour gave Fleet Street just the cue it needed for an enjoyable bout of colonial self-indulgence. ‘All the rest of our empire has been given away on honourable terms,’ continued Johnson. ‘All the rest of our colonies were meticulously prepared for independence, by setting up model parliaments ... and by providing a judiciary professionally educated on British lines to maintain the rule of law.’ Shamefully, the same could not be said of Hong Kong.<sup>3</sup>



The end of the line. Her Majesty’s Ship the Royal Yacht *Britannia* sails at Hong Kong harbour, 23 June 1997. The ship, which became the floating base for Prince Charles, arrived a week before the territory was to be handed back to China after more than 150 years of British rule (1997).

Other brave commentators suggested there might be a more complex pre-history to this handover. Author Martin Jacques thought the ceremony showed, ‘no sense of contrition, of humility, of historical awareness. This was British hypocrisy at its most rampant and sentimental.’<sup>4</sup> Instead of a moment of self-regard and imperial nostalgia, the journalist Andrew Marr thought this final, colonial retreat should have been an opportunity for a new British identity to emerge. ‘So enough Last Posts and folded Union Jacks. Enough “Britannia” and enough weary self-deprecation from the Prince of Wales. We should not leave Hong Kong with too much regret.’<sup>5</sup>

In his memoirs, Prime Minister Tony Blair admits to a startling failure to appreciate the historical significance of the return of Hong Kong to China, as a rising, newly prosperous country sought to take its place in the world and shed the memory of its ‘century of humiliation’ at the hands of British, French and American forces.\* After President Jiang Zemin teased the jet-lagged and jejune British premier about his poor knowledge of William Shakespeare

he then explained to me that this was a new start in UK/China relations and from now on, the past could be put behind us. I had, at that time, only a fairly dim and sketchy understanding of what the past was. I thought it was all just politeness in any case. But actually, he meant it. They meant it.<sup>6</sup>

However, one member of the British delegation remained determined to cling on to the past. In a confidential diary entry entitled ‘The Great Chinese Takeaway’, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales laid bare his despair at seeing the Crown colony returned to the mainland. Watching another piece fall from his family inheritance, the prince lamented the ‘ridiculous rigmarole’ of meeting the ‘old waxwork’ Jiang Zemin, and the horror of watching an ‘awful Soviet-style’ ceremony in which

‘Chinese soldiers goose-step on to the stage and haul down the Union Jack’. Charles Philip Arthur George Mountbatten-Windsor knew all too well that, when his time came to assume the throne, the loss of Hong Kong meant Britain’s imperial role would be long past. ‘Such is the end of Empire, sighed to myself.’<sup>7</sup>

\* \* \*

As Great Britain’s formal empire finally receded into the distance, the public debate about the legacies and meaning of that colonial past has grown only more agonized.<sup>8</sup> Famously, in his 2003 book *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, the historian Niall Ferguson made a stirring and influential case for the British Empire as the handmaiden of globalization and force for progress. ‘No organization has done more to promote the free movement of goods, capital and labour than the British Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And no organization has done more to impose Western norms of law, order and governance around the world,’ he wrote. Since globalization and the modern world were, for Ferguson, a ‘good thing’, this also meant the British Empire – for all its messy crimes and misdemeanours – was equally praiseworthy. ‘Without the spread of British rule around the world, it is hard to believe that the structures of liberal capitalism would have been so successfully established in so many different economies.’ Much of the chaos of the twentieth century was, he suggested, a product of the decline of transnational empires. And he went on to urge the White House of President George W. Bush to take up what Kipling called ‘the white man’s burden’ and show some imperial leadership. For Ferguson, the British Empire offered the most salient guide for Washington’s diplomats and generals as they sought to craft their own Pax Americana across the Middle East.<sup>9</sup>

As critics pointed out, there were numerous problems with Ferguson’s version of empire: its Whiggish focus on the heroic age of Victorian achievement to the exclusion of the more amoral adventurism of the eighteenth century or bloody counter-insurgencies of the twentieth century; its unwillingness to chart the broader impact of colonialism on indigenous peoples; its concentration on the free-trade period of British imperialism as the Empire’s defining ethos; and its dichotomous, good *versus* bad balance-sheet approach to the past.

Yet just as unhelpful a side-effect of Ferguson’s case was that it provoked an equal and opposite reaction from scholars and commentators who sought, by way of contrast, to cast British imperialism as a very bad thing. In the context of political opposition to perceived American imperialism at the turn of the twenty-first century, discussion about the British Empire (particularly on the political left) was reduced to slavery, starvation and extermination; loot, land and labour. In the words of the left-wing author Richard Gott, ‘the rulers of the British empire will one day be perceived to rank with the dictators of the twentieth century as the authors of crimes against humanity on an infamous scale’.<sup>10</sup>

Much of Gott’s case has received official endorsement in recent years with a series of public acknowledgements by European governments of colonial crimes. In 2004 Germany apologized for the massacre of 65,000 Herero people in what is now Namibia; in 2008 Italy announced that it was to pay reparations to Libya for injustices committed during its thirty-year rule of the north African state (judged by *Time* magazine to be ‘an unprecedented act of contrition by a former European colonial power’); in 2011 the Dutch government apologized for the killing of civilians in the 1947 Rawagede massacre in Indonesia; and in 2012 the President of France, François Hollande, officially acknowledged the role of the Parisian police in massacring some 200 Algerians during a 1961 rally. Then, in 2013, the United Kingdom government (having apologized for the Great Famine of 1845–5



and expressed official regret over Britain's role in the Atlantic slave trade) was forced by a High Court judgement to announce a £20 million compensation package for 5,228 Kenyan victims of British abuse during the 1950s Kenya Emergency or Mau Mau Rebellion. 'The British government recognizes that Kenyans were subject to torture and other forms of ill-treatment at the hands of the colonial administration,' Foreign Secretary William Hague told the House of Commons. 'The British Government sincerely regrets that these abuses took place and that they marred Kenya's progress towards independence.'<sup>12</sup>

The danger now is that, as the legacy of Empire moves into the realm of official apologies, lawsuits and compensation settlements, the space for detached historical judgement has perceptibly narrowed. For the history of Empire is always more complicated than the simple binary of ruler and ruled – as episodes such as the loss of America in 1776, the tortured psychology of the settlers of the White Dominions, or the endlessly unclear place of Ireland within the British imperial imagination demonstrated. What is more, as Linda Colley has suggested, 'one of the reasons why we all need to stop approaching empire in simple "good" or "bad" thing terms, and instead think intelligently and enquiringly about its many and intrinsic paradoxes, is that versions of the phenomenon are still with us'.<sup>13</sup>

The most compelling of those phenomena still with us is the chain of former colonial cities dotted across the globe. From the Palladian glories of Leinster House in Dublin to the Ruskinian fantasia of the Victoria Terminus in Mumbai to the stucco campanile of Melbourne's Government House to the harbour of Hong Kong, the footprint of the old British Empire remains wilfully in evidence. After sporting pastimes and the English language (to which might be added Anglicanism, the parliamentary system and Common Law), Jan Morris has described urbanism as 'the most lasting of the British imperial legacies'.<sup>14</sup> And this imperial heritage is now being preserved and restored at a remarkable rate as postcolonial nations engage in a frequently more sophisticated conversation about the virtues and vices, the legacies and burdens of the British past and how they should relate to it today.

This book seeks to explore that imperial story through the urban form and its material culture: the cities telling the story of the British Empire. It charts the changing character of British imperialism through the architecture and civic institutions, the street names and fortifications, the news page plays and ritual. And it is the very complexity of this urban past which allows us to go beyond the 'good' and 'bad' cul-de-sac of so much imperial debate. The history of colonialism covered in this study suggests a more diffuse process of exchange, interaction and adaptation. The historian John Darwin has described Empire as 'not just a story of domination and subjection but something more complicated: the creation of novel or hybrid societies in which notions of governance, economic assumptions, religious values and morals, ideas about property, and conceptions of justice, conflicted and mingled, to be reinvented, refashioned, tried out or abandoned'.<sup>15</sup> This nuanced account of negotiation and exchange is nowhere more obvious than in the advanced intellectual and cultural environment of the British imperial city – in the Indo-Saracenic architecture of Bombay, the early African mosques of Cape Town, or the Bengali Renaissance which British scholarship helped to foster in Calcutta.

The history of these cities also exposes how the justifications and understandings of imperialism changed across time and space. As English and then British imperial ambitions developed from the late sixteenth century, so the intellectual rationale of the leading advocates of Empire evolved. The motivation of the planters in early seventeenth-century Ulster would have seemed entirely foreign to the free-traders of nineteenth-century Hong Kong or to the White Dominion troops fighting for

Empire in the First World War. Yet the presence of these often cumulative and sometimes competing sets of motives does not mean that the British Empire lacked ideology. There has been a long and often disingenuous history of imperial commentators expressing their amazement at the full extent of Britain's colonial ambitions. In 1762 Horace Walpole marvelled at how 'a peaceable, quiet set of tradesfolks' had become the 'heirs-apparent to the Romans and overrunning East and West Indies'. In the nineteenth century, the Cambridge historian J. R. Seeley famously described the British Empire as the product of 'a fit of absence of mind'. And a more recent history of Empire suggests it all emerged through a process of 'anarchic individualism'.<sup>16</sup> In fact, during every stage in the development of Britain's imperial ambitions there were political philosophies, moral certainties, theologies and ideologies at hand to promote and explain the extension of Britain's global reach. At times Britain was a mercantilist empire, at other times a free-trading empire; in certain periods, Great Britain was involved in a process of promoting Western civilization, at others in protecting multicultural relativism; for a good period prior to the 1807 abolition of the slave trade, Britain regarded itself as an empire of righteous exploitation, and afterwards part of a selfless crusade for liberty. As Joseph Conrad's Marlow acerbically notes in Conrad's peerless novella of colonial realism *Heart of Darkness*, it was an *idea* that had to redeem the practice of empire at any particular point: 'An idea that you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to.'<sup>17</sup> Down the centuries, it is possible to trace contentious debates in public, press and parliament about the purpose and nature of imperialism, its costs and benefits, its relationship to British identity and its strategic and economic requirements. There were complaints that Empire benefited a narrow mercantile elite at the expense of the public purse; that it involved arbitrary and abusive systems of political rule that threatened historic British liberties; or that it was Britain's divine mission to spread commerce and Christianity abroad.

The ambition of this book is also to explain how those ideologies of Empire were made flesh through the urban form and habits of city life. As the historian Partha Chatterjee has written, 'empire is not an abstract universal category ... It is embodied and experienced in actual locations'.<sup>18</sup> The shifting justifications and contested understandings of Empire shaped the design and planning, the sport and pastimes, the rhetoric and politics of Britain's colonial cities. The manner in which settlers and indigenous residents interacted and the way in which those dynamics shaped the fabric and culture of the city allows for a more accurate account of the day-to-day realities of imperialism. Urban history helps to move us beyond casting the indigenous victims of colonialism as just that – passive recipients of metropolitan, European designs in which they had neither voice nor influence.

Working chronologically and then (broadly) geographically from west to east, the following chapters trace the history of these cities, their ruling ideas and their place within the story of British imperialism. We begin with Boston as the entry-point into the First British Empire, which stretched along the Atlantic seaboard of America, and the remarkable cultural affiliation which existed between the mother country and Massachusetts right up to the American Revolution of 1776. Bridgetown in Barbados highlights the importance of the slave trade in the financing of both British imperialism and then industrialization during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Dublin is the third city of the Atlantic triangle, highlighting the complex place of Ireland within British imperial history as well as London's late eighteenth-century ambition to unite the British Isles before embarking upon its grand global ambitions.

Any such aspirations depended upon the ability of the Royal Navy to see off competing imperial powers, and the fight against the Dutch to take the city of Cape Town is a microcosm of the broader

geo-political struggle that the forces of Western Europe played out across the high seas. With the capture of Cape Town, Britain's 'Swing to the East' was secure, and Calcutta, the capital of British India, next introduces the East India Company and the beginnings of the Raj. If Calcutta signifies mercantilism, then Hong Kong was a testament to free trade, standing as a monument to the new ideologies of laissez-faire and the instrument of Britain's 'informal empire' in China. For all the lofty rhetoric, however, the colony's finances were dependent upon the distribution of opium across the Middle Kingdom. To begin with, the poppies came from Bengal, until the advent of Malwa opium brought the city of Bombay into the drug economy. Opium and then cotton production turned Bombay into one of the first industrial cities of the British Empire and, accompanying it, all the attendant problems of urban sanitation and mass immigration. The history of Victorian Bombay chronicles the mid-nineteenth-century relationship between colonial modernity and industrial capitalism.

Melbourne was another port in that global, commercial nexus: the development of the 'Queen-city of the south' signals the emergence of finance capital in British imperialism and highlights the very different place the White Dominions (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa) had within the colonial firmament; the colony of Victoria was one strand of a 'crimson thread of kinship' uniting the Anglo-Saxon family. By contrast, the Edwardian Raj was about the assertion of power and authority and no city in the world symbolized this imperial sensibility with more grandeur and world-historical self-regard than New Delhi. It was built as a monument to eternal imperial governance and yet barely finished it became the capital of an independent India. The final chapter analyses the end of Empire and the harrowing effect which decolonization had on a colonial city within the British Isles. Few places prospered more aggressively from Britain's imperial markets and global reach than Liverpool and no city suffered more wretchedly from the end of Empire. The Janus face of Empire, its durability both to enrich and undo, is only now being overcome along the docks and wharfs of an otherwise often silent River Mersey.

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In one sense, an account of imperialism pursued through urban history is obvious. While colonization might have begun as a rural pursuit, primarily involved in the extraction of mineral or agricultural wealth from foreign lands, it could not prosper without the development of an urban infrastructure to ship the riches back home. Initially, this meant the establishment of ports – such as Bridgetown for sugar, Boston for fisheries or Melbourne for gold – and then the emergence of more complicated economies around them, from ship-building to financial services to foodstuffs, leisure and retail. With these early settlements came the first springs of civic ambition. In the pioneering Ulster plantations of the late sixteenth century, there were grand plans to erect a new capital, Elizabetha. Similarly, the promoters of the Berkeley Plantation in Virginia in 1619 commissioned their representative Captain John Woodlee 'to erect and build a town called Barkley and to settle and plant our men and divers other inhabitants there, to the honour of Almighty God, the enlarging of Christian religion, and to the augmentation and revenue of the general plantation in that country, and the particular good and profit of ourselves, men and servants as we hope'.<sup>19</sup> Neither of those planned cities came to fruition. But in colonies which did contain significant commercial and strategic assets, the resources allocated to cities by central authorities rapidly escalated to cover the erection of garrisons, and places of worship, the establishment of industry and all the accoutrements of settler life. Nine out of ten of the cities in this book began their imperial lives as port economies.<sup>20</sup>

Most of them also attest to the defining attributes of colonial cities, as first set out by the urban

historian Anthony D. King: power primarily in the hands of a non-indigenous minority; the relative superiority of this minority in terms of technological, military and organizational power; and the racial, cultural and religious differences between predominantly European, Christian settlers and the indigenous majority.<sup>21</sup> In these terms, a history of British imperial cities could be matched by an account of their German, Spanish or, most usefully, French counterparts – with the development of, say, Pondicherry, Casablanca or Saigon offering equivalent insights into French imperial development. Of course, the impulses were different for each colonial power, and the totalizing nature of France's 'civilizing mission' was recorded much more deliberately in those cities' urban design and architecture.

Yet, whether it is Hong Kong or Mumbai, or indeed Shanghai or Dubai (two cities not included in this study), it is notable how Britain's imperial cities currently play a far more significant role in world affairs than those of any other former European power. At the peak of British imperial dominion, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the economic and cultural driver of the Empire was a chain of major colonial cities – Bombay, Singapore, Melbourne. The advent of the steamship and telegram network, the cutting of the Suez Canal and increase in shipping, the acceleration of global trade in the lead-up to the First World War and the role of these cities as entrepôt and export hubs gave them a powerful, semi-autonomous place within the imperial hierarchy as engines of global growth. Funds from London, Paris and Berlin finance houses were sunk into major infrastructure schemes – docks, railways, trams – as well as used to open up the colonial hinterland.

Today, one hundred years on, the world is witnessing a revival of the global city-state. Not only does the majority of the world's population now live in urban areas (with tens of millions – across Africa, China and India – accelerating the rate of urbanization each passing year), the top twenty-three 'megacities' contribute by themselves some 14 per cent of global GDP.<sup>22</sup> Urban theorist Saskia Sassen has identified 'global cities' – those cities that function as 'command points in the organization of the world economy', provide 'key locations for specialized service firms' and operate as 'sites of production, including the production of innovations ... and markets for the products and innovations produced' – as the economic powerhouses of the modern era.<sup>23</sup> And, rather like the port cities of the European empires, they operate increasingly outside the traditional framework of the nation state. In an era of instant communications and capital asset flows, global cities such as London, New York and Shanghai are international entities in their own right; the advice from branding agencies and management consultants is for companies to think of future markets in terms of cities rather than countries. If today the twentieth-century nation state is under pressure from globalization, the transnational power of world cities – operating through their own cultural and economic networks – is enjoying its own resurgence.

Alongside a twenty-first-century girdle of global cities, the language of colonial cities has also come back to life. In recent years, the Stanford University economist Paul Romer has made the case for 'Charter Cities'. 'My idea is to build dozens, perhaps hundreds, of cities, each run by a new partnership between a rich country and a poor country,' he has explained. 'The poor country would give up some land for the city, while a developed country like Britain or Canada could contribute a credible judicial system that anchors the rule of law.' Sound familiar? Romer is willing to admit that 'to some this sounds like colonialism'. But there is no need to worry. 'The developed partner country need not rule directly: residents of the city can administer the rules, so long as the well-established judiciary retains the final say, just as the Privy Council does for some members of the

If constructing a new generation of colonial cities might seem far-fetched, then what is happening in the former cities of the British Empire also strikes many critics as an unwelcome updating of discredited systems of colonial inequality.\* The difference is that this time it is class rather than race shaping the urban fabric, as the segregation of the colonial period provides the antecedent for modern forms of apartheid now moulding the downtown districts, neighbourhoods and suburbs of postcolonial cities. Anthropologist and historian Mike Davis has condemned the restitution of ‘older logics of imperial control’ in developing cities. ‘Throughout the Third World, postcolonial elites have inherited and greedily reproduced the physical footprints of segregated colonial cities,’ he writes. ‘Despite rhetorics of national liberation and social justice, they have aggressively adapted the racial zoning of the colonial period to defend their own class privileges and spatial exclusivity.’<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, in the cities of the metropole, the end of formal Empire has not meant the disappearance of colonial influence. The late Edward Said once asked, ‘Who in India or Algeria today can confidently separate out the British or French component of the past from present actualities; and who in Britain or France can draw a clear circle around British London or French Paris that would exclude the impact of India or Algeria upon these two imperial cities?’<sup>26</sup> So too with the port of Liverpool, the docks of Glasgow, the ‘merchant quarter’ of Bristol and the workshops of Birmingham. From the iconography of St George’s Hall, Liverpool, to Jamaica Street in Glasgow, to the funds supporting Matthew Boulton’s Soho House in Birmingham, the lineages of Empire continue to find a resonance in the contemporary civic fabric.

Increasingly, the British are beginning to appreciate that imperialism was not just something ‘we did to other people overseas, but a long, complex process that transformed the culture, economy and identity of the British Isles. As Nicholas B. Dirks has argued, ‘fundamental notions of European modernity – ideas of virtue, corruption, nationalism, sovereignty, economic freedom, governmentality, tradition, and history itself – derive in large part from the imperial encounter’. Once again, these transformations can be charted most obviously in our cities. In contrast to a barren conversation about Empire being a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ thing, we might reflect instead on how the processes of imperial exchange took place on these shores.

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Not least because, as Prince Charles so painfully reflected, the final embers of Empire are almost extinguished. As a Member of Parliament, I see at first hand the uncomfortable realism of the position during the monthly ritual of parliamentary questions to the secretary of state for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. While the architecture and iconography of the Palace of Westminster remain replete with the glories of Empire, question time is often little more than a rhetorical exercise in thwarted ambition: backbench Members of Parliament rise up demanding to know what Her Majesty’s Government will ‘do’ about tensions in the South China Seas or the occupied West Bank or the situation in Kashmir, as if the despatch of a Palmerstonian gunboat was still a credible option. The bombast tends to deflate when ministers dutifully respond with some warm words about the role of the European Union or the United Nations, or spell out the stark limitations of Britain’s military capacities. And when the British political class cannot have its way, its natural reflex point is a paroxysm of soul-searching about ‘our place in the world’. In the summer of 2013, a dispute with Spain over border entry into the British territory of Gibraltar (on the 300th anniversary of the Treaty of Utrecht, which ceded the Rock to Great Britain) and the decision by the House of Commons not to support milita

intervention in Syria was immediately framed within the context of colonial loss and imperial retreat.

Out beyond Westminster, the end of Empire is equally redolent – not least in my own parliamentary constituency of Stoke-on-Trent Central. In the latter half of the eighteenth century Josiah Wedgwood had been instrumental in commissioning the Trent and Mersey Canal to transport ceramic tableware from the Potteries to the port of Liverpool, then to be shipped out across the Empire. And his competitors followed suit, with the sturdy designs of Spode, Royal Doulton and the Empire Porcelain Company soon providing dinner services for colonial compounds from Canada to Australia. The booming pot banks of Stoke-on-Trent supplied the ceramics of Empire right up to the 1960s, while Herbert Minton's eponymous tiles could be found beautifying the most far-flung colonial projects – perhaps most wonderfully, Sir George Gilbert Scott's convocation hall (Cowan Jehangir) at the University of Bombay. This is not Stoke-on-Trent's only connection with Bombay, as it was in Burslem that the sculptor John Lockwood Kipling learned his craft and decided to name his son 'Rudyard' after a local beauty spot just north of the Six Towns. Rudyard Kipling, the finest poet of the Empire, would describe his birthplace of Bombay as the 'Mother of cities to me', but his name is a reminder of his link to an altogether different colonial place.

In the postwar decades, the impact of Empire returned to Stoke-on-Trent in the form of extensive migration from Pakistan and India (most notably, the Mirpur district of disputed Kashmir), but the lucrative business of imperial production collapsed. The protected markets of the Commonwealth were thrown open to global competition. As with the cotton mills of Manchester and the port of Liverpool, the relative decline of the pottery industry in Stoke-on-Trent is connected to the end of Empire. Only a generation ago, the social and economic foundations of Stoke-on-Trent – as of so many parts of the UK – were bound up with a colonial identity which has now simply disappeared.

Indeed, barely a generation ago, that connection to Empire was central to the history and identity of my own family. My father was born in 1941 at a quintessential site of Kipling's Raj – the cool climes of Ootacamund, an Indian hill station in the Nilgiris Hills of Tamil Nadu. So-called 'Snooty Ooty' (now, Udhagamandalam), with its bungalows, club, Gothic Revival Anglican church, and beagles' pack, was where the officers and wives of the Indian Civil Service retreated from the blistering heat of the plains. One such officer was Roland Hunt CMG, my grandfather, despatched to Madras with his wife Pauline as a sub-collector after a year of Empire Studies – which involved a year of Tamil and then learning to ride round the Oxford Parks – to administer British colonialism for which he and his colleagues regarded as the foreseeable future. In fact, his string of diplomatic postings perfectly mirrored the death-throes of the British Empire. When Indian independence arrived, he progressed to the High Commissions of Pakistan, South Africa and Malaya – where he assisted in the transition to Malaysia and (family legend has it) rewrote Benjamin Britten's score for the new national anthem, side by side on the piano stool, with the founding prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman. His final appointments followed the expansion of the Commonwealth, with the former colonies of Uganda and Trinidad and Tobago concluding his career as high commissioner. In retirement, the colonial legacy lingered. Visiting Roland and Pauline's bungalow in Pangbourne, Berkshire, was to enter a visual dreamscape of Empire: prints of Madras's Fort St George and Calcutta's Fort William; editions of Kipling and Conrad; the traditional colonial ephemera of drum rugs, diplomatic photographs and oriental artefacts. But to me, as a young boy, it appeared the civilization as ancient and distant, in its way, as the Aztecs, the Egyptians or the classical Greeks.

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None of this means that Empire as a global force has ended. If the formal dominion of the o

European empires has indeed faded, competing nations have emerged to fill the vacuum. In the twenty-first century, it is China and India who are on the rise, dictating a broader pivot in world affairs from the Atlantic to the Pacific – both of them exerting geopolitical ambition and challenging the remnants of Anglo-American hegemony. One of the undercurrents in this book is the playing out of this uneasy transition, from a decaying colonial legacy to the assertive impact of emerging nations in former cities of Empire. For the myriad ways in which cities restore or erase, condemn or commemorate their colonial pasts is itself another stage in the compelling and continuing history of Empire.

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# 1

## Boston

### *'A City upon a Hill'*

As evening fell on 16 December 1773, with thousands pressed into the square pew boxes and overflowing balconies of the whitewashed Old South Meeting House, brewer and politician Samuel Adams stepped forward to announce that 'he could think of nothing further to be done – that they had now done all they could for the Salvation of the Country'. The wealthy Boston merchant John Hancock agreed, erupting in frustration: 'Let every man do what is right in his own eyes!' Fifteen minutes later, the war whoops began.

It was the signal the 'patriots' had been waiting for. Secreted across Boston – in living rooms and parlours, workshops and shipyards – men had covered their faces, donned disguises and readied their weapons. Men like James Brewer, a pump- and blockmaker, whose wife had blackened his face with burnt cork; the blacksmith's apprentice Joshua Wyeth; the carpenter Amos Lincoln; the boat builder Samuel Nowell; and the lemon importer Edward Proctor. Anxious about what the ensuing hours might bring, these 'Sons of Liberty' steeled themselves for a potentially deadly clash with British troops.

Dressed as Mohawk Indians, they gathered together a hundred strong outside the Meeting House, then surged south-east through the narrow Boston lanes, shouting like Indians and whistling like boatswains, along Milk Street and Hutchinsons Street, and down to the docks, where the *Dartmouth*, the *Eleanor* and the *Beaver* sat at anchor alongside Griffin's Wharf. The crowds followed in a torchlight procession, before coming to a stop at the waterfront, silent as they watched the 'Mohawks' board the ships, brush past the crews and uncover their cargo.



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