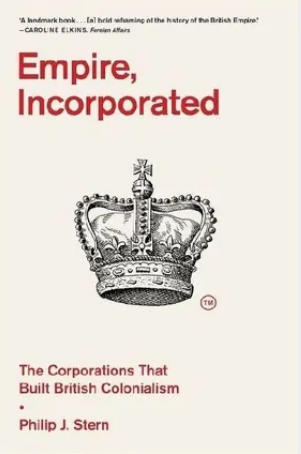
Stern

Empire, Incorporated

The Corporations That Built British Colonialism



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A Spectator Book of the Year

"Brilliant, ambitious, and often surprising. A remarkable contribution to the current global debate about empire." -William Dalrymple, author of The Anarchy: The East India Company, Corporate Violence, and the Pillage of an Empire

"Remarkable...The richness of detail and evidence that Stern...brings to his subject is [new]-as is the lucidity with which he organises his material over six long chapters that stretch from the mid-16th century almost to the present." -Linda Colley, Financial Times¿¿

"[A] commanding history of British corporate imperialism." -Michael Ledger-Lomas, London Review of Books

Across four centuries and multiple continents, British colonialism was above all the business of corporations. Corporations conceived, promoted, financed, and governed overseas expansion, making claims over territory and peoples while ensuring that British and colonial society were invested, quite literally, in their ventures. The corporation was well-suited to overseas expansion not because it was an inevitable juggernaut but because, like empire itself, it was an elusive contradiction: public and private; person and society; subordinate and autonomous; centralized and diffuse; immortal and precarious; national and cosmopolitan-a legal fiction with very real power.¿

Breaking from traditional histories in which corporations take a supporting role by doing the dirty work of sovereign states in exchange for commercial monopolies, Philip Stern argues that corporations took the lead in global expansion and administration. And, as Empire, Incorporated makes clear, colonialism's legacies continue to raise questions about corporate power that are just as relevant today as they were 400 years ago.¿

Challenging conventional wisdom about where power is held on a global scale, Stern complicates the supposedly firm distinction between private enterprise and the state, offering a new history of the British Empire, as well as a new history of the corporation.

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