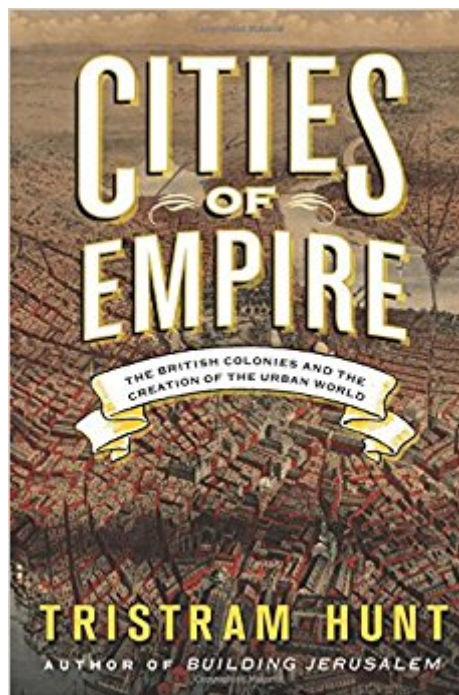




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# **Cities Of Empire: The British Colonies And The Creation Of The Urban World**



## Synopsis

An original history of the most enduring colonial creation, the city, explored through ten portraits of powerful urban centers the British Empire left in its wake. At its peak, the British Empire was an urban civilization of epic proportions, leaving behind a network of cities which now stand as the economic and cultural powerhouses of the twenty-first century. In a series of ten vibrant urban biographies that stretch from the shores of Puritan Boston to Dublin, Hong Kong, New Delhi, Liverpool, and beyond, acclaimed historian Tristram Hunt demonstrates that urbanism is in fact the most lasting of Britain's imperial legacies. Combining historical scholarship, cultural criticism, and personal reportage, Hunt offers a new history of empire, excavated from architecture and infrastructure, from housing and hospitals, sewers and statues, prisons and palaces. Avoiding the binary verdict of empire as "good" or "bad," he traces the collaboration of cultures and traditions that produced these influential urban centers, the work of an army of administrators, officers, entrepreneurs, slaves, and renegades. In these ten cities, Hunt shows, we also see the changing faces of British colonial settlement: a haven for religious dissenters, a lucrative slave-trading post, a center of global hegemony. Lively, authoritative, and eye-opening, "Cities of Empire" makes a crucial new contribution to the history of colonialism.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“A lively and cliché-busting survey of imperial history. With the richness of his approach, Hunt succeeds at moving beyond a barren conversation about empire

being a "good" or "bad" thing' to reflect instead on how the processes of imperial exchange took place. — Maya Jasanoff, *The Guardian* (UK) — "An A+ history of empire. To chart the emergence, growth, glory, decline and fall of an empire is no mean undertaking. To write about any aspect of the British Empire is to invite controversy. So emerg[ing] with honor intact is quite an achievement. And producing an original take on a much-visited theme is a genuine accomplishment. It is to the author's great credit that this book accomplishes all three ambitions with apparently effortless ease. — Michael Gove, *The Times* (UK) — "All too often, historians cast [the empire] as the supreme expression of Europe's moral superiority or as a uniquely wicked project to grind the wretched of the earth into the dust. But Hunt takes a more thoughtful approach. His new book shows how the British Empire actually worked on the ground. — It is distinguished not just by its vivid detail and fluent prose, but by the sheer complexity and subtlety of its arguments. — Dominic Sandbrook, *The Sunday Times* (UK) — "A well-documented, evenhanded work that will delight urban scholars and lay travelers. — Kirkus Reviews (starred review) — "Hunt succeeds in bringing his metropolises to life — A book to be enjoyed by an array of readers. — Library Journal

Tristram Hunt is the author of *Marx's General: The Revolutionary Life of Friedrich Engels* and *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City*. One of Britain's leading young historians, he writes regularly for *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, and *The Times*, and has broadcast numerous series for the BBC. A lecturer in history at the University of London, Hunt represents Stoke-on-Trent in the British Parliament, where he serves as the education spokesman for the Labour Party.

Very well written and interesting page turner. It is hard to imagine a small island off the coast of France constructing so many cities across the world and sparing no expense before the advent of steam! This author tracks the phases of empire through the history of spectacular cities that tell a linear story right through the present. I recommend this book to anyone interested in history or who lives in a former British colony.

I am still reading this book and so far I really like it. Great research and well written.

The legacy of the economic and political practices of the growth of the British Empire and the

implemented of those practices in colonial cities are at the root of Tristram Hunt's *Cities of Empire*. Instead of looking at the British Empire as either a good or bad "thing", Hunt examines how it grew and the impact it has on our world today while not forgetting the motivations of those who implemented the policies in the first place. Hunt examines 10 cities connected to the spread of Britain's empire around the world, giving each city its own exclusive chapter. While each city is given its own history, Hunt shows how the British experiences in one city affected their decisions in others he was writing about. The history of a particular city is not the only thing covered with the individuals who impacted it; Hunt gives the reader a wonderful portrait of the cultural, social, and architectural developments along with those who promoted them. While Hunt's descriptive writing of the architectural are wonderful, the text would have been enhanced with illustrations of some kind of the building he was describing (thought as I was reading an advanced reader's edition of the book there might be some in for sale edition). The maps at the opening of each chapter helped to place the buildings and other geographical issues into context if one got confused for any reason. Although Hunt's insights into the society of the cities he writes about, at times the information he writes feels like a redux of previous cities and so slowed my reading as thought back on previous chapters. Upon finishing *Cities of Empire* I had a better sense of the imperial history of British colonization, a topic in history that I have personally wanting to know more about. Although not perfect, Tristram Hunt's book gives the reader a history of the British Empire and its legacy in the 21st Century without judging or defending as good or evil. I whole recommend this book to those interested in the spread of British culture around the world. I received an Advanced Reader's Edition of this book via LibraryThing Early Reviewers.

I have some reservations about that "and the creation of the urban world" in the title. The book looks at not all cities but a number of cities which are the partial or whole creations of differing eras of the British Empire. That said, this is an extremely informative book and a compelling read. The book has an undercurrent of exploitation, the rich architecture and imperial regalia built on the backs of raw exploitation of--largely--nonwhite masses. The book notes that there were several famines in India, in which millions died, created mostly by British mismanagement, similarly to Ireland in the Famine. The book mentions this kind of thing more passing, than a theme--the book is not a polemic or a condemnation. In fact it rather admires the vigor and resilience of the British in building or rebuilding the cities. The tour starts with the Boston Tea Party in the 1770s. Boston was a creation of

trade, and one of the more important cities in the English speaking world at the time. This sets the frame for what follows. How the city was built, notable people both British and local, and brief but nicely written bits of context. Chapter 2 in Bridgetown, in Barbados in the 1700s, creator of riches and the human misery attending the sugar industry. City 3 is Dublin, with a lot of architecture and some Irish history, some of it rather gory. City 4 is Capetown, in the 1800s, a colonial crossroads and way station, multicultural and not considered fully South African by some critics. City 5 is Calcutta, and this chapter is as close to condemnatory as Hunt gets; he describes the once prosperous Bengal reduced to poverty and starvation caused by British trade policies. City 6 is Hong Kong, outgrowth of trade with China, originally and forever evil, because it was made by forcing opium on China. City 7 is Bombay, inherited from the Portuguese (a wedding gift as a Portuguese princess married a British king), a British creation and center of a cotton industry. City 8 is Melbourne, based on gold. City 9 is New Delhi, then and now center of an ostentatious raj, that Hunt seems to think has seen Indian rule supplant British but not so different. City 10 is Liverpool, based on slavery (in the 1700s 5,000 slavers left Liverpool). The book pivots on Liverpool, the end of Empire and the start of a new empire moving in--Hunt sees Liverpool as betting on Chinese trade and here the empire has come full circle, from motor of empire to entrepot for another empire. The above may seem tedious, but it is not. This is a meaty, excellent, informative and well written book. It is given a personal touch by the author's having visited them all, and making observations of the physical traces left after empire receded.

A very readable and innovative approach to discussing the evolution - or should we say, the decline and fall - of the British empire. What I most appreciated - apart from the nicely drawn maps and images of each city at the era under discussion - was the way the author connected various threads that defined the essence of the empire through his discussion of these cities. I also appreciated that the focus was on the what the empire meant for the fate of cities that exist to the present rather than trying to make some ultimate judgment whether the empire's net influence was good or evil. Good reading if you're planning a trip to any of the cities covered here (including my own city of Boston - the author mentions historical facts that I never knew but which definitely captures the roots of Beantown!).

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