

Top 10 Books on European Colonialism

By Bill Muehlenberg



This article was first published on [Culture Watch](#)

What to read on this divisive topic:

Americans used to celebrate and exalt in things like Columbus

Day. Australians used to celebrate and exalt in things like Australia Day. But now the leftist revisionists claim that Christopher Columbus, Captain Cook, and others like them were all about genocide, racism, imperialism, exploitation and oppression. Instead of promoting and celebrating them, we must now denounce and reject them.

That is the narrative we hear day in and day out, and not just during national holidays. It is all part of the critical theory campaign that is seeking to demonise the West and undermine Western civilisation. It is simply the old Marxism in new garb.

And unlike many of my opponents, let me lay my cards on the table. The books I offer here present a certain point of view. That is, they argue that on the whole, European colonialism was a force for good in the world. Yes, plenty of mistakes were made, and some bad things certainly occurred. But all up, things were much better than what the black armband view of history suggests.

The reason I list these ten books here is because there would be hundreds – even thousands – of books out there that attack and condemn European colonialism in particular, and the West in general. Go to any bookstore and you will find so many of them, but likely the ten I list here will be hard to come by.

Here then are the books I highly recommend. The first eight are more directed at colonialism as a whole:

Biggar, Nigel, *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning*. William Collins, 2023.

Crocker III, H. W., *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the British Empire*. Regnery, 2011.

Ferguson, Niall, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*. Basic Books, 2003.

Fynn-Paul, Jeff, *Not Stolen: The Truth About European*

Colonialism in the New World. Bombardier, 2023.
Gilley, Bruce, *The Case for Colonialism*. World Encounter Institute/New English Review Press, 2023.
Gilley, Bruce, *In Defense of German Colonialism: And How Its Critics Empowered Nazis, Communists, and the Enemies of the West*. Regnery, 2022.
Kumar, Krishan, *Visions of Empire: How Five Imperial Regimes Shaped the World*. Princeton University Press, 2017.
Sowell, Thomas, *Cultures and Conquests: An International History*. Basic Books, 1998.

But these two older works look specifically at Christian mission *and colonialism*:

Stanley, Brian, *The Bible and the Flag*. IVP, 1990.
Stephen Neill, *Colonialism and Christian Mission*. McGraw-Hill, 1966.

And I speak to those two books in this article: <https://billmuehlenberg.com/2015/09/01/christian-missions-and-colonialism/>

As can be seen, 2023 was a good year for crucial scholarly works coming out which sought to make the case for European colonialism – or at least to respond to the usual criticism that it was only always evil. The volumes by Biggar, Fynn-Paul and Gilley are very important indeed. The first two I have already discussed in some detail – see [here](#) and [here](#).

Here I want to speak further to the 2023 Gilley [volume](#). And I must tip my hat to a friend (thanks Kendra) for alerting me to his book. I was aware of his important 2017 article and the controversy that broke out over that, but I did not know it

was all turned into a full-length book.

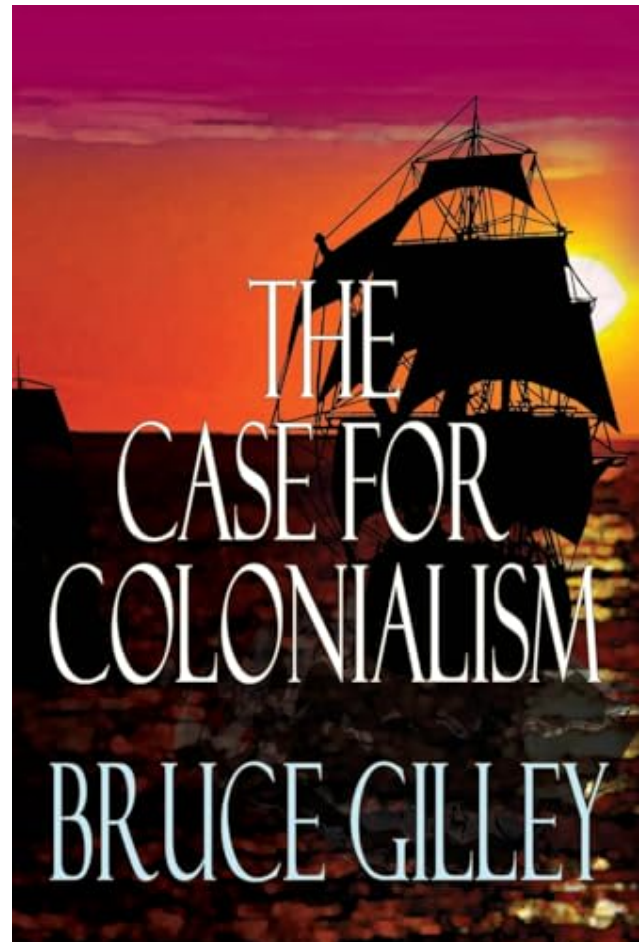
If you are not aware of the article that erupted into such a storm, it was this: "[The Case for Colonialism](#)". It was published in *Third World Quarterly*, September 8, 2017. However, it was pulled by the author after so much abuse, hate and death threats came his way. It then appeared in 2018 in *Academic Questions*, the journal of the National Association of Scholars, "where it is the most read article in the journal's thirty-four year history".

The Introduction to that article goes as follows:

For the last hundred years, Western colonialism has had a bad name. Colonialism has virtually disappeared from international affairs, and there is no easier way to discredit a political idea or opponent than to raise the cry of "colonialism." When South African opposition politician Helen Zille tweeted in 2017 that Singapore's success was in part attributable to its ability to "build on valuable aspects of colonial heritage," she was vilified by the press, disciplined by her party, and put under investigation by the country's human rights commission.

It is high time to reevaluate this pejorative meaning. The notion that colonialism is always and everywhere a bad thing needs to be rethought in light of the grave human toll of a century of anti-colonial regimes and policies. The case for Western colonialism is about rethinking the past as well as improving the future. It involves reaffirming the primacy of human lives, universal values, and shared responsibilities—the civilizing mission without scare quotes—that led to improvements in living conditions for most Third World peoples during most episodes of Western colonialism. It also involves learning how to unlock those benefits again. Western and non-Western countries should reclaim the colonial

toolkit and language as part of their commitment to effective governance and international order.



The Case for Colonialism by
Bruce Gilley

Part 1 of the book features the entire original article, a discussion of the angry calls for it to be cancelled, his follow-up piece, and so much more. Part 2 offers “Episodes of Colonialism.” Part 3 speaks to “Colonialism in the United States and Canada.” Part 4 presents “Voices of the Colonized.”

Here I can offer a few quotes to give you a feel for the book. In Part 4 he has a chapter on the noted writer and Nobel laureate in literature V. S. Naipaul. He says this about him:

Born of Indian immigrants in Trinidad and then settled in

Britain for most of his career, Naipaul was that rare bird who reckoned with the inevitability, attractions, and benefits of colonialism, while calling out the hypocrisy of anti-colonial intellectuals who both loved and scorned empire. Naipaul's legacy is a reminder of the lack of imperial reckoning by those who consider themselves empire's victims, wallowing in anti-imperial comforts.

Naipaul argued that European colonialism was unique in the history of empires because it was based on a "universal civilization" whose ideals applied to everyone. No other imperial expansion had been based on the premise of the fundamental equality of men, and none had undertaken anything like the civilizing mission that assumed all men had the same potential. The "White Man's Burden" was a real one and it had been undertaken with honour and success. One might add a Churchillian coda that European empire was the most hypocritical, venal, and inhumane endeavour in the history of global expansion, except for every other example. (p. 295)

And there are of course more than ten good books on empire and colonialism, and Gilley discusses a few of them in the Introduction to his book:

Two works by economists published in 1999 were the first to gather together long-term data to show the economic benefits of colonialism. Cambridge economic historian David Fieldhouse, born in India to missionary parents, showed that the main gift of colonialism was to have conjoined backward areas to the world capitalist system. Post-colonial leaders had a choice: either embrace or spurn that legacy...

The 1990s also saw the first serious attempts at the statistical modelling of colonial legacies. The American

economist Robin Greier found that British colonies, mainly because of their educational systems, generated sustained growth for their colonies. Across all colonies, those that were held for longer did better...

Stanford political scientist David Abernathy in his magisterial account of the year 2000 on European global expansion, ended his book with the conclusion that depending on how you weighted different factors, there was a plausible weighting in which "the case for colonialism is strong". The breakthrough into open discussion came in 2003 when the distinguished British historian Niall Ferguson published *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*. Like Fieldhouse, he argued that economic and political modernization could not have happened without colonialism. The British Empire brought the English language, property rights, banking, the rule of law, Christian ethics, a limited state, representative government, civil society, and the idea of liberty to places that would have at best concocted some debased local interpretation of these things in the absence of direct colonial rule...

Serious thinkers began to return to the basics. The American philosopher Christopher Morris wondered in a 2006 essay why critics of colonialism never paid attention to the evidence of illegitimacy, repression, exploitation, racism, and violence in independent states. "All systems of governments involve some kind of 'domination'," he noted. One could not deny that in principle, good colonies could be more ethical forms of domination than bad states. In practice, it did not take a trained statistician to see that many were. "Nice empires are 'not so bad'," Morris wrote, "and empires are not harder to justify or to legitimate than states." (pp. 27-29)

As I say, other good books on this topic exist, and some of

the others I listed above will also be the subject of articles in the coming weeks. But the case can be made that instead of demonising Europe and its colonial efforts, one should start to praise both when praise is due.