**Title—The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the mid-Nineteenth Century**
**Author—Andrew S. Thompson**
**Year—2005**

Categories: Colonialism/Imperialism, British Empire, Social History
Place: Britain & British Empire
Time: 1850-1960

Argument Synopsis:
      Thompson sets out to explore the role played by the empire in shaping British society in the past and the present. The bulk of the book is focused on the period from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, or the period of the most active imperialism for the British Empire. He aims to create a real history of Britain that adequately factors in the empire, Thompson contends that histories of Britain fail to fully consider the impact of the empire on the metropole. He argues that in modern political discourse both the British left and right have long treated imperialism as merely an 'unpleasant aberration' in British history. Thompson organizes his study around six questions. First, how did the British people regard their empire and how far was it embedded in their lives. To answer this, Thompson looks at the imperial involvement of elites in the empire and at what empire meant to the working class. Second, was the empire a source of economic strength or weakness to Britain; Thompson examines British standards of living during the period under study. Third, how far did the experience of empire define British nationhood and how did the UK's local and regional identities connect and compete with a larger British imperial identity. Fourth, which of Britain's colonies 'struck back' in terms of affecting the British metropole. Thompson claims that the self-governing dominions, such as Australia and South Africa, occupied a prominent place in the British public's imperial imagination. Fifth, was the empire's influence all-encompassing or did much of Britain's history remain untouched by imperial activities. Sixth, the opinion differs over the nature of imperialism's impact on Britain, was it progressive or reactionary, is there a link between empire and 'modernity'.
      One of Thompson's main argument is that there have been two main barriers for understanding the empire's impact on the metropole. These barriers were: the failure to recognize how diverse and pluralistic the empire was and the failure to recognize how diverse and pluralistic the British metropole was. He claims that imperialism was always part of a larger imaginative complex. He highlights the issue of British economic decline for its ability to further illustrate the difficulty of disentangling the 'domestic' from the 'imperial.' Thompson argues that the empire should be considered as a secondary factor in economic decline, pointing to relevant internal factors, such as the state privileging the financial sector over the manufacturing industry. He concludes with a brief discussion of the ways that the British have tried to come to terms with their imperial history during and after decolonization. Thompson reveals that the British public developed a rich relationship with the empire that extended beyond the boundaries of their domestic society.

Key Themes and Concepts:
- Need for more attention to be paid to the impact of the empire on Britain
- Difficult to draw line between pride over Britain's position on world stage and pride in the empire
- Reject the ideas that Britons were largely indifferent/ignorant of the empire and that Britain was saturated by imperialism