

FULL CITATION: In this carefully researched, compellingly written, psychologically insightful examination of the relationship between liberal ideas, imperial agendas, and historical writing in the nineteenth century, Theodore Koditschek seeks to answer one of the most perplexing questions about Britain's empire; namely, how such an avowedly liberal state could have maintained and justified such a patently illiberal empire for so long. Drawing on the published writings and personal papers of leading nineteenth-century British, Irish, and Indian writers, Koditschek demonstrates that liberalism was central to the history of empire, both for the British and for many of those they ruled, albeit in different ways. One of the book's many strengths is that Koditschek treats his subjects with great sympathy and understanding even where he is most critical of their ideas about progress and empire, highlighting the personal and familial contexts out of which those ideas emerged. Blending social, political, and intellectual history, Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination sheds new light on the role of historical imagination in the establishment and legitimation of liberal imperialism, and carefully delineates how the contradictions of empire could be managed with discourses of history and progress.