

Better Britons: Reproduction, National Identity, and the Afterlife of Empire

By Nadine Attewell

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In 1932, Aldous Huxley published *Brave New World*, his famous novel about a future in which humans are produced to spec in laboratories. Around the same time, Australian legislators announced an ambitious experiment to “breed the colour” out of Australia by procuring white husbands for women of white and indigenous descent. In this study, Nadine Attewell reflects on an assumption central to these and other policy initiatives and cultural texts from twentieth-century Britain, Australia, and New Zealand: that the fortunes of the nation depend on controlling the reproductive choices of citizen-subjects.

Better Britons charts an innovative approach to the politics of reproduction by reading an array of works and discourses – from canonical modernist novels and speculative fictions to government memoranda and public debates – that reflect on the significance of reproductive behaviours for civic, national, and racial identities. Bringing insights from feminist and queer theory into dialogue with work in indigenous studies, Attewell sheds new light on changing conceptions of British and settler identity during the era of decolonization.

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Editorial Review

Review

‘Attewell’s focus on specific moments of reproductive crisis across diverse geographies and genres allows her to illuminate the centrality of reproductive projects… *Better Britons* makes a welcome and valuable contribution to the field of empire studies.’

(Eddy Kent *English Studies in Canada vol 41:04:2015*)

‘Attewell offers an enlightening and meticulous interpretation of twentieth century British and post imperial literatures.’

(Matthew Levay *Year’s Work in English Studies vol 95:01:2016*)

“*Better Britons* is an original and challenging study of reproductive policies in early twentieth-century settler-invader contexts. It offers sophisticated and provocative analyses of the connections between these policies as they were used to bolster tentative national identities in the closing era of the British empire. It makes an important and original contribution to postcolonial studies.”

(Cynthia Sugars, Department of English, University of Ottawa)

“Nadine Attewell’s book is a rich and complex examination of the relationship between reproduction and national identity that encompasses modernist fiction, science fiction, and archival material on indigenous people in New Zealand and Australia. Its weaving together of these genres shows the continuities between legal, cultural, and literary texts.”

(Radhika Mohanram, Professor of English and Critical and Cultural Theory, University of Cardiff)

About the Author
Nadine Attewell is an assistant professor in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University.

Users Review

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Dorothy Vinson:

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