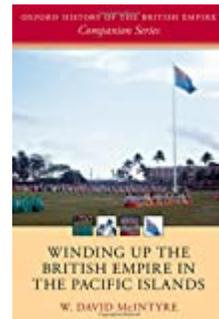


**W. David McIntyre.** *Winding Up the British Empire in the Pacific Islands.* The Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. xvii + 278 pp. \$99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-870243-6.



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Between 1970 and 1980, the British government wound up its empire in the Pacific: Tonga and Fiji in 1970, Niue in 1974, Papua New Guinea in 1975, the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu in 1978, Kiribati in 1979, and Vanuatu in 1980 (Western Samoa, the Cook Islands, and Nauru gained their independence the decade before). For many historians of Britain's decolonization, the grant of independence to these small Pacific territories has largely been viewed as little more than an afterthought to the process of decolonization. Policymakers and administrators were concerned with the transition of power in India, Palestine, Malaya, Kenya, Nigeria, and Jamaica; they were less engaged with Niue and Kiribati. For example, in his first full study of Britain's retreat from empire (*Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World* [1988]), written less than a decade after Vanuatu's independence, John Darwin argues that the end of empire occurred in two great convulsive movements, one centred in Asia in 1945-48, the other in Africa between 1960 and 1964.<sup>[1]</sup> Darwin's chapter on "winding up," intended to look at the end of empire east of Suez, has little to say about the Pacific, focusing instead on the Persian Gulf, the Far East, and Rhodesia. More recently, Ronald Hyam, in *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation* (2006), dates the end of empire (and his

book) to 1968; Martin Shipway, in *Decolonisation and Its Impact* (2008), chooses 1964 as the end date; and Wm. Roger Louis's *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonization* (2006) has the sun set on the empire with the British withdrawal from the Gulf in 1971. None of the Pacific islands that received their independence between 1970 and 1980 appear in Louis's meticulous index. These are the forgotten places of empire.

In his new book, *Winding Up the British Empire in the Pacific Islands*, acclaimed Commonwealth historian W. David McIntyre, professor emeritus at New Zealand's University of Canterbury, seeks to bring these territories back into the limelight and argue for the importance of this final stage of the end of empire, which Foreign Secretary Jim Callaghan called "accelerated decolonization," a term McIntyre adopts throughout the work. Contrary to Darwin's suggested two stages of decolonization, McIntyre suggests that there were instead eight, spread not across the eighteen years from 1946 to 1964, but instead from 1867 when autonomous government was granted to British North America to the 1970s and 1980s. These phases of decolonization (which ran concurrently with expansion of empire in other areas) were: (1) Dominion status, (2) realignment by force, (3) international trustee-

ship, (4) end of the Raj, (5) search for a mezzanine statue, (6) wind of change, (7) withdrawal east of Suez, and (8) accelerated decolonization (p. 21). As a whole, decolonization was a much more involved and fluctuating phenomenon than has been previously thought, and the immediate decades following the Second World War were but just one phase of this continuing process. McIntyre's aim in *Winding Up the British Empire in the Pacific Islands* is to study in detail the eighth and final stage of decolonization, which he describes as "the true death warrant of the empire" (p. 33). He does this in three main parts: part 2, "Holding On" (covering the years 1949-60); part 3, "Letting Go" (covering 1960-68); and part 4, "Winding Up" (1970-80). With a remarkable level of detail driven by in-depth archival research, McIntyre creates what is surely the definitive story of the end of the British Empire in the Pacific, arguing that above all else it was United Nations anticolonialism and the British government's drive to be an Atlantic and European power (through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Economic Community, respectively) rather than a colonial power that provided the nails for the coffin, nails that British policymakers and administrators were only too happy to hammer.

Part 1 is excellent, essentially serving as a three-chapter introduction to provide context for what comes next—both context on the Pacific and its place in the British Empire in particular, and on the stages of decolonization in general throughout the empire. It is lucid and efficient, and could be required reading for any graduate seminar on British decolonization. Parts 2, 3, and 4 take on a different tone altogether, delving into the minutiae of imperial policy. These chapters are research driven, with little engagement with existing secondary literature, heavily dependent on official minutes and memoranda held at the National Archives, from the colonial office, the dominions office, the cabinet office, and the foreign and commonwealth office. This is very much the history of the official mind, with little reference to sources beyond departmental records (McIntyre draws on only two collections of personal papers), yet one nevertheless gets the sense that this is history being written, covering ground that has not before been trodden upon by historians. The epilogue is less satisfying. Coming after fifteen chapters of dense, encyclopedic

prose on the end of empire in the Pacific islands, it utilizes just three and a half pages to remind the reader of why this all matters. In this task, it largely fails to convince, and while *Winding Up the British Empire in the Pacific Islands* will be essential (and, indeed, unmatched) reading for anyone interested in the detail of how the British government wound up its empire in the Pacific islands, it makes a smaller impact of changing perceptions of the decolonization process in general.

McIntyre's work is published as a volume in the Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series, a series intended to "pursue themes that could not be covered adequately in the main series while incorporating recent research and providing fresh interpretations of significant topics" (p. v). For the most part, these works—ranging from geographically focused volumes to those organized on a thematic basis—have been edited volumes with multiple authors. As a mirror of the organizational structure of the five main volumes of the series, this has the great advantage of providing an overview of the state of the field from the perspectives of a number of historians, bringing together expertise from across the field and exposing the reader to a variety of viewpoints. Even the volumes that are not edited collections were coauthored. *Winding Up the British Empire in the Pacific Islands* is the only single-authored volume in the entire Oxford History of the British Empire Series, including its Companion Series. While this is no fault of McIntyre himself (who is, beyond a shadow of doubt, the most eminent scholar on this subject), this reviewer questions its inclusion as a single-authored volume in the Companion Series, and would encourage the general editor of the Oxford History of the British Empire Series to return to the earlier model of edited collections or multi-authored manuscripts for any subsequent volumes. This is not to criticize the book itself, which is a fresh and interesting account of an important phase of decolonization, but only to suggest that its placement seems ill-matched with other contributions to the series.

#### Note

[1]. John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 334.

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