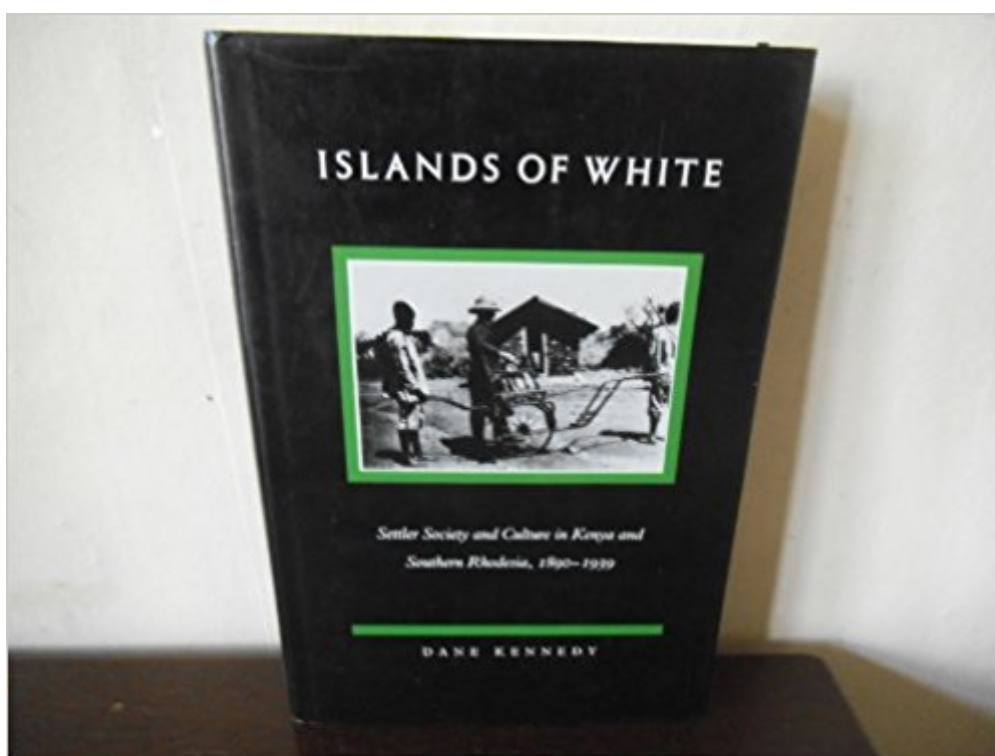


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Islands Of White: Settler Society And Culture In Kenya And Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939 (Duke University Center For International Studies Public)



Synopsis

International studies.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

International studies.

In his study, "Islands of White," Dane Kennedy offers a novel perspective on the social dynamics of white settler colonies in imperialist Africa. Kennedy convincingly illustrates how these white societies were able to create a distinct and unified culture. Presenting a new interpretation of white settler society, Kennedy analytically demonstrates how the social identity of white colonists was radically recast to accommodate their special circumstances. Kennedy's study is of long lasting importance to the field of African history because it reveals the powerful dynamics of solidarity within colonial societies which consequently enabled them to create and maintain a system of domination over the indigenous African population. While the majority of historians have primarily focused on the social divisions within the settler populations, Kennedy asserts that economic, ethnic, and social differences were secondary to the overriding need for unification. Kennedy remains balanced in his approach by conceding that a certain amount of social friction within the colonies cannot be denied. Yet, he also sustains that the preoccupation of Marxist historians with the internal fissures of white society neglects to appreciate the external strength of the community. Through an analysis of the particular experiences faced by white settlers, Kennedy portrays how white settler society was not

simply a transfer or replication of European national traits onto colonial society in Africa. He holds, "this was the distinguishing feature of the settler culture: not in the cherished values of the settlers' European heritage, but in the centripetal forces that distorted that heritage by securing it against all change." (192) To further establish this claim, the author effectively applies knowledge of social psychology to interpret and explain the pathological behavior of the white settlers. Kennedy's compelling argument is fully supported through his analytical utilization of many sources and statistical evidence. The extensive use of well documented private and official manuscripts further validate Kennedy's persuasive argument. Unlike many documents on colonialism, the volume appears to be written without prejudice and without reference to a preconceived view of determents. While historically solid, Kennedy's work brings a fresh, unbiased insight to the inner workings and far-reaching impact of white settler colonists. As Kennedy has firmly established in his study, "Islands of White," settler culture was the expression of the white community's delicately held position of dominance in the order of imperial Africa. In order to maintain this dominance, white settlers exerted strong social power to shape and control their identity and position. The significance of Kennedy's book is in its illustration of the power group solidarity can have in shaping a community and its neighbors.

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