Oceania and the Victorian Imagination contributes significantly to our discussion of the non-peripheral place of Oceania in Victorian culture. While the contributions of India and Africa to the nineteenth-century imagination have been well-documented, examinations of the contributions of Oceania have remained on the periphery of Victorian studies. The Pacific’s effects, as youthful encounters at exhibitions, chapel, home, or school formed lifelong impressions and experience. It would be difficult to fully understand the Victorians as they understood themselves without considering their engagement with Oceania. This collection not only gathers together some of the most important, influential and controversial work which has come to be labelled ‘new imperial history’, but also presents key examples of innovative recent writing across the Pacific’s cultural and colonial trajectory. This book is the perfect companion for any student interested in colonial and postcolonial history.

How Do We Look? Fatimah Tobing Rony draws on transnational images of Indonesian women as a way to theorize what she calls visual biopolitics—the ways visual representations determine which lives are made to matter more than others. Rony outlines the mechanisms by which images—be they portraits of Paul Gauguin’s 1893 portrait of Annah la Javanaise—a trafficked thirteen-year-old girl found wandering the streets of Paris—as well as US ethnographic and documentary films—in each instance, the figure of the Indonesian woman is inextricably tied to discourses of primitivism, savagery, colonialism, exoticism, and genocide. These works, such as Runa Islam’s video art installation The Dance that Makes You Vanish, Nia Dinata and Tanja Potocnik’s The Man Who Makes You Young, Vietnam and Indonesia’s Paris Expo (1996), and the collaborative films of Nia Dinata, challenge the uncritical methods of seeing that portray, naturalize, and deny deaths of people of color. By theorizing the mechanisms of visual biopolitics, Rony elucidates both its violence and its vulnerability.

Decolonizing Cultures in the Pacific: contemporary writers’ critical engagement with colonialism and indigenous culture, Najita argues, provides a powerful tool for navigating a decolonized future. Najita draws on literary, anthropological, historical, and postcolonial scholarship to explore the traumatic history of contact and colonization that has become a crucial means by which indigenous peoples of Oceania are reclaiming their cultures, languages, ways of knowing, and political independence. In particular, she examines how contemporary writers from Hawai’i, Samoa, and Aotearoa/New Zealand remember, retell, and deploy the violence of colonialism in their work. As Pacific peoples negotiate their place between indigenous and settler cultures, these writers play an invaluable role in revising and contesting the various uses of the histories of colonialism, advancing frameworks and lines of thought to imagine new futures by removing the past. Decolonizing Cultures in the Pacific is a valuable addition to the fields of Pacific and Postcolonial Studies and also contributes to struggles for cultural decolonization in Oceania—contemporary writers’ critical engagement with colonialism and indigenous culture. Najita argues, provides a powerful tool for navigating a decolonized future.