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Imperial Leather chronicles the dangerous liaisons between gender, race and class that shaped British imperialism and its bloody dismantling. Spanning the century between Victorian Britain and the current struggle for power in South Africa, the book takes up the complex relationships between race and sexuality, fetishism and money, gender and violence, domesticity and the imperial market, and the gendering of nationalism within the zones of imperial and anti-imperial power.

Anne McClintock explores the sexualizing of the terra incognita, the imperial myth of the empty lands, the dirt fetish and the "civilizing mission", sexuality and labor, advertising and commodity racism, the Victorian invention of the idle woman, feminism and racial difference, and anti-apartheid culture in the current transformation of national power.

Using feminist, post-colonial, psychoanalytic and socialist theories, Imperial Leather argues that the categories of gender, race and class do not exist in isolation, but emerge in intimate relation to one another. Drawing on diverse cultural forms\_novels, advertising, diaries, poetry oral history, and mass commodity spectacle\_the book examines imperialism not only as a poetics of ambivalence, but as a politics of violence. Rejecting traditional binaries of self/other, man/woman, colonizer/colonized, Anne McClintock calls instead for a more informed and complex understanding of categories of social power and identity.