

AIDAN FORTH. *Barbed-Wire Imperialism: Britain's Empire of Camps, 1876–1903*. Berkeley Series in British Studies 12. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017. Pp. 368. \$85.00 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2018.62

This provocative and ambitious new book examines multiple camps that proliferated—but not evenly so—across the British Empire, confining more than ten million people. Focusing on camps driven by plague, famine, and war in India and South Africa, Aidan Forth shows how British imperialism gave rise to an interconnected series of crises, which it then tried to solve with mass encampment. How, Forth asks, did Britain's empire of camps contribute to the modern world?

Forth is the latest to grapple with the endless contradictions (here, made strikingly material) of liberal imperialism and the precarious relationship between aid and coercion that typified European empires. For Forth, camps embody the tensions of British imperialism itself: security, sociospatial control, and paternalistic sympathy. The camps of liberal democracy, Forth points out, were distinguished by a lively culture of critique and protest, in which life behind the wire was fashioned as much by those who opposed or sought to reform camps as by those who created them.

In his opening chapter, Forth examines the Victorian preconditions for Britain's empire of camps and the ways that rapid urban concentration gave rise to new spatial politics. He locates the prehistory of camps in the welter of prisons, workhouses, factories, and hospitals that organized nineteenth-century people and places. Legitimated by the language of Christian uplift, as well as by social scientific knowledge about, for example, the “criminal tribes” of India, the Victorians evinced a persistent concern with taking socially suspect groups and fixing them in space.

Forth moves in his second chapter to the Indian famine camps, showing how the Raj erected a vast system of camps to combat the sufferings and social upheaval of hunger. As famine became a recurrent feature of British rule, camps—with their cheap and rudimentary facilities—served to forestall the creation of a more permanent and pricier colonial welfare state. The famine camps were also important sites of critiques from Indians and Britons, showing how mass encampment in the British Empire was never unopposed.

In chapter 3, Forth turns to plague camps in India and South Africa, which served as significant points of contact between British and colonial populations. Although these camps did not succeed in suppressing plague, they nevertheless were cemented as a lasting feature of British colonialism. Forth is deeply attentive to local conditions that facilitated or worked against strategies of encampment. In Australia, for example, there was far more wariness about authoritarian or repressive measures against settler populations with disease. Thus, “camps offered widely applicable technologies of disease control. But they did not prevail everywhere” (91).

Throughout the book, Forth gives a vivid sense of the built environment and daily routines of the camps, carefully documenting how these spaces converged with and diverged from their predecessors. In chapter 4, he analyzes the use of fences as well as other components of camp architecture that underscored both the dream of order and the reality of chaos. The camp's boundaries were delineated not only through physical space but through complex rituals of admission that marked the line between inside and outside.

Chapters 5 and 6, which explore civilian concentration camps in South Africa, constitute the heart of the book. As Forth notes, these camps, located at the junction of modern warfare and modern humanitarianism, facilitated both the coercive military concentration of civilians and the care and control of these same populations. These South African camps “embodied the repressive and humanitarian vagaries of the British Empire: the Jekyll and Hyde of Britain's imperial venture” (131). The camps established new tropes of humanitarian critique—for example, in Emily Hobhouse's horrifying images of emaciated children, which would have

their own long afterlives in Oxfam and Save the Children campaigns. Ultimately, Forth concludes, the British understood the Boers as “African” enough to be collected into camps, but also “European” enough for this encampment to be an outrage (185).

In chapter 7, Forth considers how visions of famished inmates dying behind barbed wire challenged Britain’s image as a humane imperial power and galvanized projects of camp reform. Here, Forth makes the important point that imperial scandals of camps detracted attention from more quotidian forms of coercion and injustice. Reformers focused on ameliorating the death rates of camps, and not on a sustained critique or condemnation of camps as such (or the military practices and social policies that generated camps in the first place). Britons quietly normalized the notion that a “good” camp was possible, until at least World War Two—and arguably beyond.

Looming over the whole book, of course, are the Nazi and Soviet camps of World War Two, and what connections—if any—Forth sees between Britain’s imperial camps and these later, deadlier histories. Forth is admirably precise in establishing a historically grounded genealogy for camps. Rather than relying on vague analogies, he delves deeply into connections of architecture, personnel, and traditions of opposition and protest. Despite a few sensationalistic moments (“From Africa to Auschwitz”), Forth’s treatment is judicious. He steers away from causal claims, but he concludes that Britain contributed to global cultures of encampment by disseminating the idea of the camp on a broader stage and desensitizing the world to the notion of civilian encampment.

Compellingly, Forth suggests that contemporary refugee camps—not the more terrifying totalitarian camps of the twentieth century—are the true inheritors of Britain’s empire of camps, with their characteristic twinning of aid and force. In the epilogue, Forth presents his narrative as a “usable history.” I entirely agree—but would have liked to have heard more about the precise use to which this beautifully written history might be put. One might follow Forth’s story forward to consider Britain’s ongoing role in determining who gets encamped and what levels of encampment liberal democracies are willing to tolerate. Long past the days of barbed-wire imperialism, Britain’s policies of refuge still drive encampment in the Global South, but also right across the Channel.

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HELEN FRY. *The London Cage: The Secret History of Britain’s World War II Interrogation Centre*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017. Pp. 244. \$26.00 (cloth).
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The secrecy surrounding what took place at the London Cage, the British government’s intelligence gathering center in Kensington Palace Gardens during the Second World War, has become something of a *cause célèbre* within the field of intelligence history. In this new book, Helen Fry makes use of the material now available to shed further light on what was hitherto only suspected about what took place there. She begins her story by rehearsing the tale of its former director, Colonel Alexander Scotland, and how he attempted to publish his memoirs in the mid-1950s, much to the horror of security services. While a heavily redacted version did appear in 1957, it was commonly supposed that much detail had been suppressed. At the time, the reasons for this suppression appeared to be the possibility that British might have been deemed to have breached the terms of the Geneva Convention, something that they had been very keen to use as evidence against the Nazis, and also because the