



**Lisa Ford.** *The King's Peace: Law and Order in the British Empire.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021. Illustrations, maps. 336 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-24907-3.

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Lisa Ford's *The King's Peace: Law and Order in the British Empire* promises to "track the changing parameters of colonial peacekeeping in the Age of Revolutions, and through it, the fraught transformation of the British imperial constitution" (p. 3). With five case studies of events that took place in Massachusetts, Quebec, Jamaica, Bengal, and New South Wales between 1764 and 1836, Ford claims to "showcase sudden and massive legal divergence between the center and periphery of empire" and reveal the emergence of autocracy and "a new kind of empire" reliant on extralegal policing and militarization (p. 5).

Boston's Liberty Riot in 1768 illustrates the disorders faced by agents of empire in the run up to the American Revolution. Riot and threats of violence from white colonists revealed the weakness of the Crown and the powerlessness of the king's agents to enforce the peace. Residents of Massachusetts justified their intimidation and threats of violence with their belief that the peace was not the king's to keep but rather that of white, Protestant men in the name of the people. Ford calls this "the end of empire" (p. 47).

The book proceeds to reconstruct what Ford considers the ramifications of the American Revolution to the legal history of empire, attributing to Parliament and British colonial officials a new resolve to buttress the king's power and prerogative

against similar future threats. In the period after the American Revolution, the Crown accrued great powers by Acts of Parliament that increased the power of governors and decreased the power of legislative bodies or eliminated them entirely. Judges appointed by the Crown and supervised from London enhanced Crown control over colonial legal systems. The Crown's expanded power was often framed as a duty to protect.

The focus of chapter 2 is Quebec where white Protestant men again resisted the military rule installed upon British victory in the city in 1759. British Protestant merchants resented any limits to their participation in the fur trade and objected to any concession of rights to French Catholics. Ford argues that in response to their ungovernability and Catholic vulnerability, the Quebec Act of 1774 created a Crown colony in Quebec, granting the governor expanded powers to rule without a legislative body. Even after the creation of the elected assemblies of Upper and Lower Canada in 1791, legislation was subject to the approval of an appointed upper house and gubernatorial veto.

The empire then used this model of a Crown colony as an instrument of royal authority and control. Although not new, the Crown colony was favored over other models in new parts of the empire. Chapter 3 demonstrates the expansion of the Crown's power in Jamaica through a strong milit-

ary presence and the regular imposition of martial law. Through an examination of Trelawny Maroons, Ford argues that the governing elite and the governor collaborated in the task of keeping slaves at peace by circumscribing the rights of both enslaved and free men and women. The unlawful behavior of governmental authorities is again on display in chapter 4, in which Ford discusses how Bengal's governors routinely used civil and military violence against innocent people. Ford shows how "enlightened men turned their backs on procedural fairness out of cultural chauvinism and expedience" (pp. 141-42). Despite the misgivings of some British colonial officials, the consensus was that, "in the context of disorder, the needs of society and the state outweighed the need for individual justice" (p. 163). Ford's final chapter is on New South Wales with a focus on the Bushrangers Act of 1830 and the *Murrell* case in 1836. The Bushrangers Act attempted to curb unlawful robbery and violence perpetrated by small bands of men, many of whom were convicts. It allowed the police to make an arrest on mere suspicion and placed the burden of proof on the purported offender. The *Murrell* case expanded the jurisdiction of colonial authorities to include Australia's indigenous population.

Ford concludes that in the "era of counter-revolution, colonial order was a good that trumped liberty, justice, and equality before the law" (p. 231). The book delivers on its claim to demonstrate a rising autocracy across the empire. This top-down story provides the perspective of British authorities. Ford is a compelling writer and each of the chapters draws on a wide range of archival and published sources. Her methodology, with its multisited reach and specific details of each of the cases, supports her assertion that "the making of the imperial constitution was global and local" (p. 228).

The argument acknowledges race but at times protests that race does not capture the phenomenon. This conclusion would have benefited from a

closer examination and analysis of race. In particular, a focus on whiteness would reveal the process by which groups who are phenotypically white—Catholics, Jews, Irish, French, Australian convicts—were judged to be more or less eligible for the full rights of subjects because of their proximity to the imagined normative Protestant subject and in contrast to blackness and indigeneity.

The book takes legal divergence as a new phenomenon of this period, but the laws of slavery had been in effect for over a century when Ford's first case takes place. This calls for a more radical reassessment of the historiography, definition, and theories of legal divergence and an examination of the assumptions that have driven this misapprehension by nineteenth-century legal commentators as well as contemporary scholars. Where does Ireland and the Act of Union (1801) that dismantled Dublin's parliament fit in to the center/periphery? Ford characterizes the "compromises" and "deep misgivings" of British officials who devised and implemented legal technologies that were lawless and unlawful. One way to explain them is as a predictable feature of the law and the ideology of rule of law so often deployed as the justification for Britain's imperial expansion.

The title's reference to the king's peace would have benefited from closer examination and a more nuanced treatment. British authorities collided with their colonial subjects over their desire for a monopoly on violence in the pursuit of an extractive, oppressive, capitalist empire. They often justified their unlawful and lawless behavior as a form of protection. There were few contradictions to that definition of the king's peace.

Any book that raises this many questions is certainly a valuable addition to undergraduate and graduate syllabi and is sure to generate productive historiographical conversations.

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