

## **Lisa Ford, *The King's Peace: Law and Order in the British Empire*.**

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*The King's Peace* is both an essential and a timely work. At its heart, the book traces “the fraught transformation of the British imperial constitution” between the mid-eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, in which a shift took place “from colonial self-government to autocratic rule” (3). This transformation is explored through careful study of key colonial conflicts that drove it, with attention to Massachusetts from approximately 1764 to 1774, Quebec from approximately 1759 to 1774, Jamaica from approximately 1730 to 1805, Bengal from approximately 1772 to 1815, and New South Wales from approximately 1787 to 1836. All the histories covered are recounted with meticulous attention to local detail as well as with unflagging vibrancy. Collectively, they provide an insightful window into numerous core thematics regarding the relationship between law and violence in the British Empire in the era covered. Among other themes brought into focus are the relationship between white Protestant settlers and the crown in 1760s Boston, the tensions and opportunities raised by the incorporation of French-speaking Catholics into Britain’s North American empire in the same period, the complex negotiations between the authorities and the “Maroon” community in Jamaica across the eighteenth century, innovations in policing (and the numerous yet largely fruitless challenges thereto) in turn-of-the-century Bengal, and the legal lengths to which the authorities were prepared to go in order to attempt to address the “problem” of bushrangers in New South Wales in the 1830s.

For legal scholars in many former British colonial jurisdictions, including but not limited to those directly addressed, *The King's Peace* will be an important book because of the extent to which the effects of the transformation it traces are still with us. As Ford puts it, “[t]he transformation of empire to meet the exigencies of the colonial peace in the Age of Revolutions is ... a story about the growing power of the crown” (17). Key and enduring developments of the period took a variety of forms, including the establishment of powerful new governors, enhanced crown powers of appointment and dismissal, and expanded executive powers to utilize force, conduct detentions, and suspend ordinary judicial processes. These developments could be seen, in one way or another, in the Regulating Act of 1773, the Massachusetts Government Act of 1774, and the Quebec Act of 1774, among numerous other manifestations. While the British Empire is now formally in the past,

the approach to governance inaugurated during the turn-of-the-nineteenth century period remains powerful, all the more so to the extent that it is under-examined, across the territories it once controlled. Casting greater light on the circumstances through which executive power was expanded in that period, as Ford does, hence has a key role to play in allowing the appropriate limits of executive power today to be more thoroughly interrogated.

The force of Ford's approach and the significance of her central themes, as well as her deeply engaging mode of writing, are underlined by the extent to which one is left wanting more. As Ford observes in her discussion of Quebec, as well as in the context of Jamaica, among the purposes that "authoritarian" central power might be made to serve was to "punish settler crimes" (93). The difficult question of to what extent we should therefore not look entirely unfavorably on such an expansion of power is, however, left as an implicit one. Similarly, while there is no doubt that the power of the metropolitan authorities increased over the period in question, whether or not this meant more coercive governance overall, for all those subject to the power of the British Empire, is a question also left on the margins. Questions of broader structural causation present themselves, but remain unanswered, as well. To what extent were the transformations in approach detailed driven by ideational debates relating to the colonial controversies covered? To what extent were they driven by more tangentially related political contestations and shifts in the metropole? To what were they driven by the changing demographics of empire? To what extent were they driven by the changing power and ability of the British state to project power across distance in the period? And/or to what extent were they driven by the changing demands of commercial and capitalist interests? There are also questions as to the relative significance of different historical periods in terms of the generation of contemporary public order law. How significant were the transformations in governance in the British Empire across the turn of the nineteenth century, that is, in comparison to later developments—including the rapid development and expansion in modes of repressive law and institutions in the early twentieth century—relative to forms of governance encountered around the former British colonial world today?

The breadth of such issues is such, of course, that no single work could address them all. It is, rather, a testament to the incisiveness of *The King's Peace* that it raises such a broad a set of fundamental questions. It may be both hoped and expected that this book will serve as a spur to further investigation by a range of scholars, from a range of jurisdictions, bringing a range of interests and perspectives to the fundamental questions of constitutional law, or perhaps better public law, raised. If we are to challenge the legacies of empire, it will be necessary not only to confront, as Ford observes, the structural forces generating "the vast inequalities that undergird the wealth of European and Anglophone settler polities," but also to grapple with the extent to which the British Empire set a model of repressive public order legality that continues to manifest itself today, including in "state capacities for surveillance and control" (22). Understanding the historical processes through which the contemporary transnational and international legal orders were produced is

essential to challenging the inegalitarian and repressive components of those orders, and it is a project to which *The King's Peace* makes a vital contribution.

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## **Henrietta Harrison, *The Perils of Interpreting. The Extraordinary Lives of Two Interpreters between Qing China and the British Empire***

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At the heart of Henrietta Harrison's book, *The Perils of Interpreting*, there is more than simply *The Extraordinary Lives of Two Interpreters*; namely, George Thomas Staunton and Li Zibiao: an Englishman from an Irish family and a Chinese subject, also known as Giacomo Li, who was a member of the Catholic minority in Liangzhou, on the north-western frontier of today's Wuwei, China. Behind the parallel lives of these two people is the story of the complex ways in which the Qing Empire and the British Empire came together in one of the most hectic periods in both Chinese and British history, and especially in the history of global trade, diplomacy, and world political order. The years between Lord George Macartney's embassy to Peking at the court of the emperor Qianlong in 1792–94 and the First Opium War (1840–42) were crucial for the fate of relations between Europe (and the United States of America) and the Far East, as well as for the lives of the two protagonists of the book. Giacomo Li and George Thomas experienced those events first-hand, in the fundamental role of interpreters and cultural mediators, but also as bearers, in their respective roles, of an original inter-cultural approach, which the difficulties inherent in Sino-Western relations rendered fraught with uncertainties, risks, and dangers.

Although the book focuses on the biographical journeys of Staunton and Li, it is roughly divided into what we could essentially distinguish as two parts: before and after the Macartney embassy. The first part, Chapters 1–5, is dedicated to reconstructing the early stages of the life and education of Staunton (born 1781) and Li (born 1760). Staunton was the son of a demanding, very strict father (with extensive experience in the Caribbean and India) who was keen to give his son a first-rate, out-of-the-box education inspired by his