

Winner of the 2013 Graduate Prize

Aidan Forth (Stanford), “Repression and Relief: Civilian ‘Concentration Camps’ in the British Empire, 1871-1903.”

When, in February 1939, the British Ambassador to Germany, Sir Nevile Henderson, met with Herman Goering in Berlin, he delivered a denunciation of what he termed the “loathsome and detestable brutalities” that were occurring in Nazi concentration camps. Goering responded by opening the “K” volume of a German encyclopedia and reading the following definition: “*Konzentrationslager*: first used by the British, in the South African War.”

Aidan Forth’s powerful paper begins with this exchange between Henderson and Goering. Entitled “Repression and Relief: Civilian ‘Concentration Camps’ in the British Empire, 1871-1903,” the paper explores the British imperial roots of internment of civilians behind barbed wire. Forth compellingly places concentration camps themselves—one of the most horrifying, yet most emblematic institutions of the twentieth century—within the full spectrum of the timeline of modernity.

Here, Forth illustrates that South African concentration camps were not anomalous, but continued a longer and larger British Imperial history of “fencing in” civilian populations during moments of perceived emergency. Tracing encamping practices back to plague and famine measures in colonial India, Forth widens our perspective on the ideologies and practices of incarceration under imperial rule and illuminates the ongoing tensions of humanitarianism.

2013 Graduate Prize Committee members: Sears McGee, Jordanna Bailkin and Peter Hoffenberg