

Editors' Introduction

This special issue of *Radical History Review* was not intended initially as one about fences and walls. The editors began instead with a broader objective: to assemble examples of current scholarship that would revisit, historicize, and critique conventional understandings of the historical process of *enclosure*, the classic formulation in Marxist historiography that places the privatization of public property at the crux of the transition to capitalist modernity. Yet a striking number of submissions to *RHR*'s call for papers on the topic of enclosure converged around the fence, that seemingly primitive technology that effectively alters the distribution of property as well as the logic of human geography. Fences are “good to think” about the social, economic, and legal—not to mention architectural—dimensions of the process of the creation of a propertyless working class. Surely it is for this very reason that protesters claiming their inalienable right to subsistence have so frequently targeted fences, walls, and other means of physically dividing the land. Like the crumbling wall that separates neighbor from neighbor in Robert Frost's iconic poem “Mending Wall,” the architecture of enclosure is vulnerable not only because nature stubbornly resists these artificial impositions on the landscape but also because these fences and walls so nakedly display the legal fictions that bolster social injustice. The man mending the dividing wall in Frost's poem needs to utter the phrase “good fences make good neighbors” repeatedly precisely because it is so unconvincing.

This issue of *RHR* on fences and walls is, then, the first of a two-part series that seeks to illuminate the radical roots of the historical study of the enclosure of the commons in order to sustain the historical legacy of enclosure as a relevant critical tool. The present issue, 108, examines the process of enclosure in ways that closely mirror its original usage as the closing of open pasturage. Feature essays, a narrative reflection, and photo essays in this issue focus on segmented geographical spaces and subsequently blocked access to them in contexts as diverse as New

Radical History Review

Issue 108 (Fall 2010) DOI 10.1215/01636545-2010-001

© 2010 by MARHO: The Radical Historians' Organization, Inc.

Delhi, Northern Ireland, preindustrial and nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain, Durban, South Africa, the U.S.-Mexican borderlands, rural Australia, Israel/Palestine, and both the southern and midwestern prairies of the United States. By contrast, the contributions to issue 109 will stray a bit farther afield from fences and walls and take up new approaches to the concept of enclosure. That issue will examine phenomena such as intellectual property and electronic commons, cultural heritage movements and patrimony, urban planning projects and the politics of eminent domain, and art projects that create new public spaces and fictional nation states. These two issues, taken together, embrace a more expansive definition of enclosure not merely to be experimental but, rather, because scholarship and thinking on the erosion of all kinds of common privileges continue to refer back, either implicitly or explicitly, to the basic reality of the fence that has separated landless farmers from the land.¹

Much Marxist historiography on enclosures has relied on the hostile example of early modern England's rural gentry, which made sheep pastures and forests inaccessible to rural peasantries in the wake of the era's ideological, political, and economic changes. A series of parliamentary acts and juridical precedents, which intensified in the eighteenth century and mostly tapered off by the end of the nineteenth, effectively brought about a reversal of the prior tolerance toward such territorial ambiguities as blank spaces on maps, overlapping use rights, and imprecise borders.² Gleaners and other beneficiaries of the traditional commons were transformed categorically into poachers as fences, trenches, and walls came to separate the landless from their customary sources of food, firewood, grazing land, and other necessities.³ As both a symbol and an architectural reality, the fence separating people from their means of subsistence sustained a process that also, later, took place in urban and rural landscapes alike in the wake of the global transition to industrial capitalism.

Contemporary thinkers routinely evoke the concept of enclosure in a variety of contexts, usually in ideologically charged tones. As Peter Linebaugh and Ben Maddison make clear in their respective contributions to the present issue, Garrett Hardin's prescriptive discussion of the "tragedy of the commons," an idea introduced in a speech Hardin delivered in 1968 and further developed in his later work, largely set the terms of the debate in the final three decades of the twentieth century. Hardin, and the rational-choice social science that his work helped set in motion, held that public resources must be enclosed to save the public from its own, avaricious self-interest.⁴ Just as famously, E. P. Thompson revisited the process of enclosure in early modern, rural England and traced social and legal conflicts over the use of the commons to show how the law acted to mystify its role in cementing socioeconomic inequalities.⁵ Neoliberal thinkers and writers later came to dominate the discussion, arguing that the commons was disappearing throughout the world because of its supposedly inherent instability as a form of ownership and rights regime. Even as the concept of enclosure has buttressed the social science and policy thinking that

has alienated peasants and urban workers from the means of autonomous subsistence, radical thinkers have proffered it to critique what Mike Davis calls the “late-capitalist triage of humanity.”⁶ The concept of the commons has become a generic metaphor for public property—academic disciplinary knowledge, or access to the airwaves, for example—and, by extension, the commonweal.

Clearly, the implications of these fences, walls, and trenches resonate beyond the transformations that beset foragers of the early modern English fens and forests. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that enclosure, as a twin phenomenon of proprietary demarcation and dispossession, describes both an ongoing process and an organizing principle of modern life. The rise of the modern walled city, heated conflicts over access to water around the world, debates over the legitimacy of eminent domain claims that take place around urban planning, rezoning, and gentrification projects, and controversies surrounding the development of pharmaceutical patents, to name just a few modern iterations of the political problem of enclosure, have all extended the idea of the fencing off of common property in the interest of private gain and liberal (or neoliberal) individual property rights. Yet rarely have we paused in any public forum to take stock of the idea of enclosure—to explore the connections between, for example, the type of “primitive accumulation” to which Marx and his interlocutors applied the term and its more abstract, contemporary iterations, or to historicize rigorously its application.⁷ The journal editors hope that the contributions to this issue and to issue 109 will provide just such a forum.

Peter Linebaugh’s essay, a combination of objective scholarship and personal reflection, sets the tone for the themes and questions generated by this issue’s focus on fences and walls. Linebaugh, whose scholarly profile has largely been achieved through the significant historical contributions he has made to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British political historiography, describes in detail the circumstances that spawned an organized counterrevolutionary movement against enclosures in rural England in the 1830s. Linebaugh draws a direct genealogical line from antienclosure movements in nineteenth-century England to the emergence of radical scholars in the 1960s and 1970s, who absorbed the lessons of these resistance movements into modern British social and political historiography. Linebaugh himself played an active part in this history of radical scholarship that he recounts. His essay offers not only a reflection on his own involvement in the political and institutional development of these interventions; it also gives the reader a sense of the intellectual influence that antienclosure movements have had, and continue to have, on academic work and political activism in the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first that have focused on historicizing property and public space.

Ben Maddison’s contribution to his issue also directly addresses how one antienclosure movement in the Anglophone world informed future ones—in this case, how antienclosure movements emerged against the backdrop of colonial empire. Historians of empire have extended scholarship on Britain’s domestic enclo-

sure acts to consider the connections that this reordering of the domestic landscape might have borne to the country's simultaneous overseas expansion.⁸ Colonialism, and then decolonization, both involved the breakdown of forms of corporate ownership. The Atlantic wave of decolonization in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries occurred in tandem with the transition away from a mercantile economy to a capitalist one. At its core, nineteenth-century liberalism was based on individual land ownership, and it necessitated the dissolution of the corporate ownership of lands formerly held by the church, the crown, and indigenous communities. This reapportioning of property and use rights brought about a protracted crisis of sustenance for the postcolonial world's peasant majority.

In the case of nineteenth-century Australia, settler colonialism centrally involved imposing new forms of land tenure. To understand the history of the Australian commons and its enclosure, Maddison excavates a deeper history of ideas and political action in favor of the rights to the common. He comes to focus on the crucial contribution of the seventeenth-century English Diggers to the promotion of commoners' interests. Through their utopian communities and published writings, the Diggers, Maddison argues, created a new paradigm for thinking about commoners' rights. When white, landless settlers in nineteenth-century Australia took up the fight for their rights to the common, they both indirectly and directly drew inspiration from the Diggers. Interestingly, though, Maddison shows that Australian settlers' reenactment of their forebears' pro-commons political agitation ultimately "contributed to indigenous dispossession." This article cautions us to remember that when studying movements to oppose the enclosure of the commons, one cannot assume the existence of a subaltern class united against landowners. Australia's European-descended working poor in the nineteenth century promoted their own interests at the expense of the territory's colonized people. Maddison's essay raises crucial questions about the relationship between historically distinct instances of anticommunity discourse and the extent to which we might trace a radical genealogy of antienclosure politics through time. He ultimately questions the applicability of the idea of enclosure to settler colonialism that denied indigenous peoples their own claims to property rights.

As Maddison's essay makes clear, the territorial dispossession of indigenous people under colonial rule also occurred in urban settings. David A. Johnson's essay on the political and spatial enclosure of New Delhi by the occupying British colonial government builds on the insights developed by scholars of colonial and postcolonial enclosures. Johnson meticulously documents the transformation of small landowners into dispossessed migrants who had to make room for the government's new gleaming administrative capital to reveal how New Delhi, like many colonial cities, served as both a global and a local example of enclosure's reach. Johnson offers a range of methodological tools that help make legible the effect of enclosure on subsistence farmers alienated from even their meager sources of income by drawing on photo-

graphs, maps, and quantitative analyses of administrative records maintained to keep track of colonial repossession and recalibrations of population and property.

As Johnson does for New Delhi, Sharad Chari's examination of the effects of colonial Durban, South Africa, demonstrates how the creation of urban spaces powerfully exemplifies the simultaneous global and local administration of enclosure as an exercise of imperial power. Rather than look exclusively at the shaping of urban space, however, Chari's contribution engages with the forceful critique of administrative logic embodied, quite literally, in Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics. By employing this Foucauldian concept that makes the body the medium or instrument of state power, Chari forces readers to rethink the ways in which enclosure can be deployed in postcolonial scholarship. Significantly, Chari recognizes that while the concept of the biopolitical has enormous utility and currency—as evidenced by the influential work of contemporary philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben and Achille Mbembe—historians can contribute complexity to such concepts. As Chari explains, the bodies of Durban's population were not only subject to the administrative policies of the colonial government, the more familiar dimension of Foucault's definition of the biopolitical. These policies also became, over time, the population's source of political strength as Durbanites struggled to reverse spatial subjugation and to articulate spatial individualism and independence rights in a process that Chari characterizes as biopolitical sovereignty. The author examines antienclosure resistance movements among Durban farmers in the early twentieth century and the resulting influence of those movements among antiapartheid activists in the late twentieth century. By combining this ethnographic and archival research on resistance to enclosure in South Africa with a critical reexamination of the biopolitical as an interpretive category, Chari aptly demonstrates the importance of paying attention to the local, vernacular context in which people exercise power.

David Correia's study of conflicts around the commons in 1890s New Mexico also examines the transition from colonial corporate to postcolonial individual property ownership. Critical studies of enclosure have asked whether there ever really existed a commons at all. Correia shows that, in the case of what became the U.S. West, indeed there was: the Las Vegas Land Grant, which the newly independent Mexican government assigned to subsistence farmers and herders in the 1830s. This community land grant, a stretch of collectively owned and managed land, became part of the United States after the U.S.-Mexican War. With this political transition and the consequent invasion of land speculators and large ranchers and the construction of railroads, the common-property land-tenure regime began to collapse. Las Gorras Blancas, a local version of a nationwide protest movement known as the White Caps, emerged to assert their rights to use and pass freely through the land. Although these fence-cutting night riders have typically been characterized as a "reformist peasant movement engaged in a desperate defense of rural traditions," Correia shows that Las Gorras Blancas was, instead, a "broad social movement

organized in opposition to the privatization of common-property resources and the forced shift from subsistence to industrial production.” Met with great spontaneous outpourings of public support, Las Gorras Blancas acted in the realm of both clandestine insurgency and formal, working-class politics. The legalist resistance strategy used to maintain common use rights to the Las Vegas Land Grant ultimately contributed to its privatization. Here, some inhabitants of late nineteenth-century New Mexico put up fences as part of a strategy not to further the process of privatization but rather to counter it. Ironically, a judge in a critical court case decided that the original Mexican land grant actually permitted fences; and in attenuating the definition of settled, agricultural land “to include also the common grazing land,” the judge effectively left “open the possibility for the legal privatization of common property.”

R. Ben Brown’s contribution to this issue, like Correia’s, investigates formal politics along with radical political action as it seeks to understand the conflict-ridden enclosure of the open range in the postbellum U.S. South. In both Brown’s and Correia’s case studies, radicalism around the enclosure of the open range occurred when class and racial issues attenuated the possibility of justice through formal politics. As in Correia’s study, in an inversion of the typical enclosure narrative, the subjects of Brown’s analysis sometimes seem to turn the typical enclosure narrative on its head. Notably, for instance, smallholders in the late nineteenth-century U.S. South sometimes used fences to stave off enclosure, not just to advance it. As the enclosure of the open range proceeded in the wake of emancipation and the large-scale economic and legal changes of the late nineteenth century, the subjects of this research reacted on the basis of their political interests. Brown’s research simultaneously intervenes in debates concerning not only the perennial question of what drove the process of the enclosure of common resources but also the question of the balance of political versus economic causes behind resistance to enclosure. Perhaps most emphatically, Brown’s essay directly takes on the question of whether and to what degree we can explain the enclosure of the commons in the U.S. South by pointing to a perceived need among white elites in the wake of emancipation to force freed persons, and the poor in general, into wage labor.⁹ While agreeing with those who have argued that enclosure initially served to discipline a nascent proletariat, Brown presents a substantially revised version of this thesis by reconstructing electoral politics as the engine behind the enclosure of the commons in the years following the Civil War. For many newly—albeit briefly—enfranchised African Americans during the Reconstruction era, the passionate debates around the enclosure of the open range was their induction into active citizenship.

The editors of this issue have sought to gather works that interpret the literal and metaphorical fencing off of common property as a process with many dimensions; as we have already seen, it is political as well as socioeconomic, cultural as well as legal. Yet we recognize the danger of casting such a wide analytical net: one

runs the risk of imagining *any* act of territorial division as an effect of encroaching capitalism. Indeed, such a broad, comparative study as this risks succumbing to the less-than-constructive temptation to characterize walls, fences, and lines on maps of any kind—anything that physically divides people, especially if in an unjust or oppressive way—as part of the enclosure of the commons. How can we conceptually connect these imposed physical boundaries with the process of enclosure without stretching the concept of the enclosure of the commons so thin as to render it meaningless?

In our “Public History” section, John Streamas examines *Between Fences*, a compact exhibition that traveled to twenty-eight different locations in the United States as part of the Smithsonian Institution’s Museum on Main Street program in 2008 and 2009. Streamas studies the exhibitionary logic of *Between Fences*—from its focus on the history of barbed wire in the American West, for example, to the building of Japanese internment camps during World War II, to the fixation on “good fences” and “good neighbors” manifest in front lawns, backyards, and playgrounds in postwar American suburbs—to try and understand the implications of a federal agency telling an American story. Yet like many of the contributors to this issue who attempt to reconcile national or hegemonic narratives of enclosure with their iterations in local or colloquial environments, Streamas looks at how the exhibit actually took shape in its immediate context, that of the Community Library in Ketcham, Idaho. Ketcham may appear to be only a small-town library and community space far removed from large-scale museum “blockbuster” shows in big cities, yet it effectively represents how local museums coordinate programs with local institutions such as universities, schools, and historical societies to supplement and even expand the offerings of the standardized museum exhibit.

In our section of photo essays, Gary Fields reflects on the “separation wall” in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and argues that Palestine’s “partitioned and regimented geography” is not just an Israeli defensive measure; instead, by way of the system of partition barriers, Israel uses expropriation to remake the landscape and radically to refashion the lives of people who inhabit it. The Wall is the focus of both the imposition of Israeli power and Palestinian resistance to it. To distinguish the partition wall from other modern displays of fear and exclusion like gated communities, Fields calls on “one of the earliest and most storied examples of this practice,” the enclosure of the commons in early modern England. In drawing together these disparate instances of the enclosure of the land, Fields does not posit a direct, causal connection, as both Linebaugh and Maddison do in their own studies. To assert a common genealogy for early modern English and twentieth- and twenty-first-century Palestinian enclosure would certainly not be far fetched, considering the history of British colonialism in the Middle East, yet the author does not attempt to make this point here. Instead, Fields draws a suggestive comparison, which allows us to rethink both the Palestinian and the classical English case of enclosure. The

privatization of English territory as a result of the Enclosure Acts extended beyond the economic; it was backed by a political and legal doctrine that judged who could put the land to best use and distributed property rights accordingly. Conversely, the fragmentation of Palestinian territory under Israeli occupation has been justified by political doctrine and assertions of military necessity, but it is much more than political. The conceit that some people can utilize the land more effectively is deployed in both cases; entitlement to land is derived from the capacity to improve it. Such arguments echo ominously with the battles over eminent domain abuse so familiar to students of and activists in urban politics in the contemporary United States.

Fields's reflection on the relationship of land expropriation in Palestine to the enclosure of the English common implicitly asks us to put aside the binary understanding of property-rights regimes as either private or public; in his case study, it is the government—a public entity—seizing private land. In a similar fashion, the scholar-activists Lucy Reynolds and John Schofield use the photo-essay format as an opportunity to revisit ancient Greenham and Crookham Commons. This patch of land in central England became a convergence point for antinuclear, anti-enclosure, feminist, and environmental activists during the early 1980s after a U.S. military base appropriated a portion of these commonly held lands to develop a nuclear weapons site. Reynolds's and Schofield's photographs and essay commentary show the fate of the military base at Greenham, now closed and in disrepair, as an example of how activists who immersed themselves in the history of English commons came together to challenge contemporary privatizations of public land and in the process developed rhetorical tools in the struggle against militarization and empire building.

Finally, our "Curated Spaces" section features the work of Frankie Quinn, a photographer who focuses on the individual and community bifurcations created in neighborhoods and terraced housing blocks in the wake of the spatial "protections" created to enclose portions of Belfast and other cities in Northern Ireland. What connects Quinn's work to that of Fields is the instrumental presence of technology—specifically barbed wire fences and cement walls—that defines political boundaries and orders social relationships. Quinn's photographs, like those of Fields, provide visual evidence not only of the political effects of geographical territorialization but also of the symbolic and psychological effects that living with such territorialization produces in daily encounters and has on ordinary lives. A short essay by Gabbi Murphy accompanies Quinn's photographs, providing both an immediate and a broader historical context for Quinn's work. Murphy also asks us to think about the long-term archival implications of the photographic record on future generations, who, ideally, will one day regard fences, walls, and other technological demarcations of space as a phenomenon of quaint historical interest. Admittedly, given the current state of the world, these fences and walls seem more likely to remain a part of our collective daily experience, but one lives in hope that

the more photographers like Fields and Quinn expose the spatial artifice created by fences and walls, the more effectively we can question the political fictions through which such fences and walls were created. The image on the front cover of this issue likewise shows the crucial importance of the visual record in recovering the radical history of enclosure. Looking through the photographer Ratoão Diniz's eyes as he peers through a tall, chain-link fence reminds us of the multiple purposes of and the multiple opportunities created by these barriers, the common spaces that they cordoned off, and the ways in which communities adapt to their ubiquitous presence.¹⁰

As the essays in the next issue of *Radical History Review* (109) will show, much of what we might usefully, albeit metaphorically, label as "enclosure" could never be photographed. Today the term encompasses the privatization of microscopic entities like the human genome, fictitious entities like ideas, invisible entities like the sound of a cherished old song, and intangible entities such as a neighborhood's distinctive cultural heritage. Yet even as the politics of proprietary possession and dispossession have drifted steadily into the ethereal realm, these conflicts also remain tethered to the earth.

We thank our colleagues in *RHR*'s editorial collective who assisted us with this issue, especially Duane Corpis, Thomas Harbison, Conor McGrady, Atiba Pertilla, as well as the numerous anonymous internal and external reviewers and evaluators that gave their time and energy to help make these two issues possible.

—Amy Chazkel and David Serlin

Notes

1. See William Roseberry's expansive definition of enclosure as the erosion of all kinds of common privileges; William Roseberry and Jay O'Brien, *Golden Ages, Dark Ages: Imagining the Past in Anthropology and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 27.
2. On this process in a non-European context, see Raymond B. Craib, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 63.
3. See E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (New York: Pantheon, 1975); see also Robert P. Marzec, "Enclosures, Colonization, and the Robinson Crusoe Syndrome: A Genealogy of Land in a Global Context," *boundary 2* 29 (2002): 130–56.
4. Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162 (1968): 1243–48. The best treatment of Hardin's "illiberal" ideas comes in Elizabeth Blackmar, "Appropriating 'the Commons': The Tragedy of Property Rights Discourse," in *The Politics of Public Space*, ed. Setha Low and Neil Smith (New York: Routledge, 2006), 49–80.
5. See especially E. P. Thompson's *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: New Press, 1993), chap. 3. See also Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters*. Thompson directly criticizes Hardin for caricaturing the commons as a chaotic "free for all"; Thompson, *Customs in Common*, 108.
6. Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (New York: Verso, 2006), 199.

7. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1976). In March 2007, Cornell University held an interdisciplinary conference, “Between Primitive Accumulation and the New Enclosures,” which featured a group of thinker-activists who addressed this very question.
8. D. Graham Burnett, *Masters of All They Surveyed: Exploration, Geography, and a British El Dorado* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 131; Marzec, “Enclosures, Colonization, and the Robinson Crusoe Syndrome.”
9. For works that have taken this view, see Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750–1840* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), especially the final chapter (“Prisons, the State, and the Labor Market, 1820–1842”). Also see Sidney Chalhoub, *Trabalho, lar, e botequim: O cotidiano dos trabalhadores no Rio de Janeiro da Belle Epoque* (*Work, Home, and Tavern: The Daily Lives of Workers in Belle-Epoque Rio de Janeiro*) (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1986). Both of these historians later published works that revised their earlier writings.
10. Ratão Diniz took this photograph on Praça do 18, also known as “Praça da Baixa” in the favela Baixa do Sapateiro in Maré on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. The photographer included the image in a series titled “Explosions of Joy” (“Explosões de Alegria”), which meant to counter the blinkered media’s exclusive emphasis on violence and despair among impoverished communities in urban Brazil. Ratão Diniz, personal communication with Amy Chazkel, January 15, 2010.