

Book Review

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Timothy Barney, *Mapping the Cold War*. University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, NC, USA, 2015; 388 pp. ISBN: 978-1-469-61854-8, (pbk)

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The Cold War was a physical struggle over space and around spatial perspectives on how the world should be ideologically structured. It was fought with all manner of geographical technologies including new kinds of cartographic projections as well as exploiting the age-old power of maps for their propagandist rhetoric. This well-researched book provides an interpretative review of some of the ways maps were actively deployed by the Americans in the 50-year long informational war with the Communist Bloc. Timothy Barney delineates how '[m]aps offered particular choices on how to depict missile silos and peace agreements; how small or large to portray the developing countries of the world, where to intervene; whom to fear; and whom to contain' (p.4).

After a conceptually driven introduction, the book comprises a sequence of five substantial case study chapters focused on distinct genres of map and organised approximately in chronological order, starting with the air-age cartographic perspectives that emerged from Second World War and strategic bomber, and ending on the counter-mapping Bill Bunge created in 1980s to challenge the intensified nuclear arms race of the Reagan presidency. In between Barney examines in detail the design and deployment of obviously political cartographic artefacts such as the infamous 1951 '*Gulag – Slavery Inc*' map and perhaps more surprisingly, the *Atlas of Disease* created by American Geographical Society (AGS) in the mid-1950s that can now be read for its propaganda subtext. This linear, case study approach, while conventional, works as narrative structure to carry the reader along. The selection of case studies makes sense and even though I was familiar with some of these – such as Richard Edes Harrison's artistic mapping work in the 1940s which is quite well analysed now (e.g. Cosgrove, 2005) – Barney does add some good nuggets of new information from his extensive primary research in various archives and the AGS Library. However, it would be fair to say that he has not really unearthed startlingly new examples of Cold War map or exposed novel cartographic practices. His focus is on reading the map-as-text, but Barney also tells the deeper backstory about the key personalities involved and how the maps were deployed and the impacts they had on the popular imagination and in shifting political discourse. You learn much about some intriguing figures involved creating and circulating maps at the heart of the Cold War establishment in Washington DC such as Samuel W. Boggs, the Official Geographer to the American Federal Government from 1927 to 1954. An obvious limit with the book is the lack of alternate perspectives that would have come from a consideration of the propaganda mapping created by the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, and also later on the cartographic view espoused by Communist China.

However, this constraint is acknowledged by Barney himself in the introduction and would, in many respects, be a separate research project deserving of a book of its own.

Barney's writing style is accurate and direct. The book is generally descriptive, but the passages of theoretical digression and interpretation are readable although sometimes over-elaborated. There is some repetition of conceptual points across the empirical case study chapters, but this is off set by the number of good insights coming out of the critical reading of different cartographic exemplars. The book's production by University of North Carolina Press is good, with clear reproduction of map illustrations – although it was unfortunate that there was no colour plate section in which key visuals could have been shown off to good effect.

Barney's institution context at the University of Richmond is in the Department of Communication, but pleasingly he seems well acquainted with relevant work by geographers on critical, social-informed interpretation of cartography. This book is also strongly embedded within critical geopolitics literature using many geography thinkers such as John Agnew, Neil Smith, Trevor Barnes and Matthew Farrish. The analysis in *Mapping the Cold War* relies on existing ideas in map studies and exploits well concepts around the political reading of 'scientific' cartography developed over the last couple of decades by the likes of J.B. Harley, John Pickles, Susan Schulten and Jeremy Crampton. He draws particularly heavily on the approach of Denis Wood and John Fels (2008) around 'paramap', i.e. 'all the elements not just appended to the map but also circulating in the social space around the map' (p.15). However, the major failing of the book is that does not develop any new methods of visual interpretation or novel ideas on the meaning of cartography, rather Barney reports much interesting evidence to support earlier scholarly theory. As such this research monograph effort has value for shedding light on the past, but provides little really new for maps studies or geopolitics to take forward.

While not the main focus of his book, Barney does nonetheless usefully describe how the rapidity of technological development spurred by military needs and massive capital investment in R&D during the Cold War period was a major contributing factor to changing mapping practices. The American intelligence agencies, in particular, sought strategic advantage through improved geospatial techniques to better pinpoint targets in the vast Russian interior. As a result they transformed cartographic production, 'moving from craft to automation and standardization, and relying more on sophisticated photogrammetric and photomechanical methods' (p.6).

Overall an enjoyable book that documents well a series of maps from an important time in the history of spatial technologies and political struggle that is now easily overlooked, but has undoubtedly shaped the world we live in today and the kinds of cartography we use on a daily basis.

References

- Cosgrove D (2005) Maps, mapping, modernity: Art and cartography in the twentieth century. *Imago Mundi* 57(1): 35–54.
- Wood D and Fel J (2008) *The Natures of Maps*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.