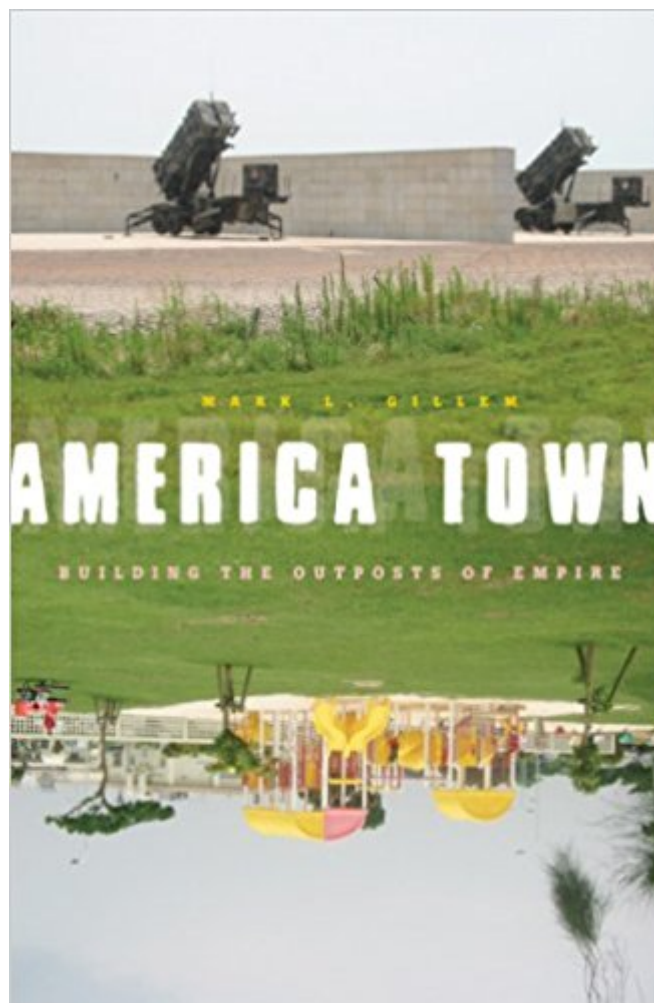


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America Town: Building The Outposts Of Empire



Synopsis

American servicemen and -women are currently stationed in more than 140 countries from Central America to Western Europe to the Middle East, often living and working on military bases that not only dominate foreign territories but also re-create familiar space that "feels like home" "gated communities filled with rambling subdivisions, franchised restaurants, and lush golf courses. In *America Town*, Mark Gillem reveals modern military outposts as key symbols of not just American power but also consumer consumption. Through case studies of several U.S. military facilities—including Aviano Air Base in Italy, Osan and Kunsan Air Bases in South Korea, and Kadena Air Base in Japan—Gillem exposes these military installations as exports of the American Dream, as suburban culture replicated in the form of vast green lawns, three-car garages, and big-box stores. With passion and eloquence he questions the impact of this practice on the rest of the world, exposing the arrogance of U.S. consumption of foreign land. Gillem contends that current U.S. military policy for its overseas troops practices avoidance—relocating military bases to isolated but well-appointed compounds designed to prevent contact with the residents. He probes the policy directives behind base building that reproduce widely spaced, abundantly paved, and extensively manicured American suburbs, regardless of the host nation's terrain and culture or the impact on local communities living under empire's wings. Throughout *America Town*, Gillem demonstrates how the excesses of American culture are strikingly evident in the way that the U.S. military builds its outposts. The defense of the United States, he concludes, has led to the massive imposition of tract homes and strip malls on the world—creating mini-Americas that inhibit cultural understanding between U.S. troops and our allies abroad. Mark L. Gillem is assistant professor of architecture and landscape architecture at the University of Oregon. He is also a licensed architect, a certified planner, and a former active-duty U.S. Air Force officer.

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Customer Reviews

I believe America Town contains a profound message and supports the idea that one need only look toward at our contingency operations to identify digestible examples of the same challenges our military faces during stateside operations. For those who have read "America's Town," I'd like to draw your attention to the article at the link. Not only does it pay tribute to the many men and women that have fought in Iraq, but it characterizes the basing trend presented in Gillem's book, America's Town (see chapters 2 & 3). In fairness, Camp Victory is/was a vital command and control center during coalition counterinsurgency efforts; however, the sheer number of required supporting forces and contractors resulted in the establishment of an "America Town" on the grandest scale with bright lights that could be seen by those from a poorly illuminated Baghdad. Today, as our military closes Camp Victory and prepares to transfer it over to the Iraqi Government, one can imagine the fate of the now vacant fast food joints, gyms, theaters, PXs, and other amenities that made life bearable for our weary troops coming in from the outlying posts (which were definitely NOT mini-America towns to be sure!) for R&R. It is doubtful these artifacts of Americana have a useful role in a modern Iraqi government center. "An American Outpost is Packing Up," Annie Gowen, 13 Sept 2011[...] Well, every Op Ed needs a "so what," so here's mine... Gillem's book proposes that we as a military have a tendency to not consider the implications of our basing actions outside the fence line. In fact he writes on pp. 35, "The planning maps produced by the U.S. rarely show anything beyond the fence line."

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