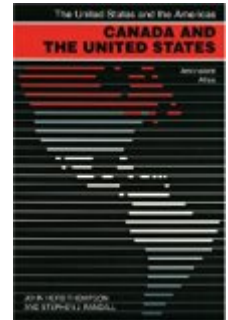


John Herd Thompson, Stephen J. Randall. *Canada and the United States: Ambivalent Allies*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008. xiv + 448 pp. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8203-3113-3.



Reviewed by Tavis Harris

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Commissioned by Stephanie Bangarth (King's University College, UWO)

In a much-revamped fourth edition, John Herd Thompson and Stephen Randall have given new life to an oft-used and generally respected work. While the book retains the central theme from earlier editions, namely that well-worn references to “the notion of a special relationship [are] more useful for after dinner speeches than for historical analysis” (p. 1), it has incorporated new scholarship on the evolving nature of Canadian/American relations and works on the national history of each member in this unequal partnership—both scholarly and in terms of global power. These new topics range from the diverse perspectives of the American Revolution, binational migration, the Progressive movement, and the origins of differences between the two nations. This new edition also includes a substantial bibliographical essay and a final chapter titled “Playing by New American Rules, 2001-2007” that nearly brings the text to the present day. Significant changes to the international order in the post- 9/11 world necessitates such a reevaluation and the authors tackle many of the issues well,

showing a degree of foresight without making ungrounded tentative predictions.

One of the key themes throughout is the persistent use of oversimplifications by both Canadians and Americans in what is often a superficial analysis of the nations' relationship. The myths of the undefended border and the “special relationship” become part of the narrative but only to show how simplistic is this understanding. Thompson and Randall trace each country's development and the ever-evolving relationship between two neighbors with vastly unequal power. This relationship has exerted a powerful influence on several aspects of Canadian society, from Canadian nationalism to self-perceptions regarding international status.

The book begins with the War of Independence and ends with the ongoing “War on Terror,” tracking key moments in the development of Canadian/American relations throughout. While these are too numerous to mention in their entirety, events both signal (such as the 1871 Washing-

ton Treaty) and more innocuous (such as the nature of political caricatures) are thoroughly treated. Overall, it is conflict, tranquility, turbulence, and institution-building that mark the Canadian-American relationship.

Thompson and Randall have created an excellent resource for general readers or an undergraduate course. Specialists may criticize the lack of detail on certain topics, but there are no omissions so sizeable as to constitute a major weakness. The bibliographical essay provides an excellent basis for more focused studies. The authors inject humor and a great degree of insight into an interesting and an increasingly important topic.

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<https://networks.h-net.org/h-canada>

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