

Book Review: Canada/US and Other Unfriendly Relations Before and After 9/11

by blog admin

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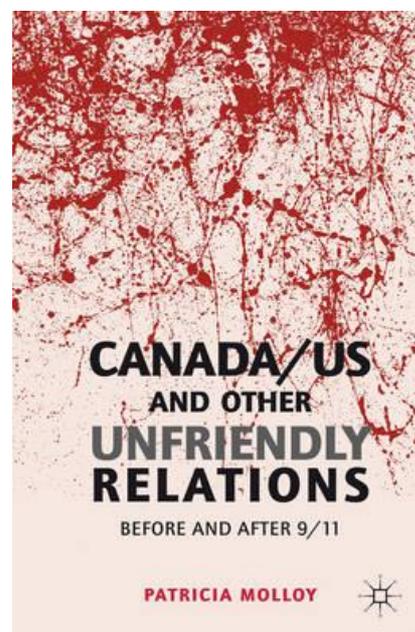
Canada/US and Other Unfriendly Relations examines relations between the two neighbours, and considers Canadian political and cultural identity before and after 9/11, giving a close analysis of how myths of Canadian benevolence are circulated in the media. What emerges is a story of a conflicted and stormy relationship between two countries, who are seen to both rival and envy each other. **Donald Abelson** argues that this thoughtful and carefully reasoned critique of the “darker side” of Canada-US relations offers a unique foray into a discussion that rarely takes place in the public arena.



Canada/US and Other Unfriendly Relations Before and After 9/11.
Patricia Molloy. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Appearing before the Canadian Parliament on 17 May 1961, President John F. Kennedy made the following observation about the special relationship between Canada and the United States. “Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners. And necessity has made us allies.” As if called upon to officiate a wedding, he noted, “Those whom nature hath so joined together, let no man put asunder.”

Ironically, in a matter of months following Kennedy’s remarks, the relationship between the two countries became strained when Prime Minister John Diefenbaker criticized the young President for not including America’s closest ally in its plans to remove missiles from Castro’s Cuba. The fall out between Canada and the United States over the Cuban Missile Crisis was not the first, nor the last, altercation between Ottawa and Washington. As Patricia Molloy observes in her provocative and disturbing analysis of Canada-US relations, shortly before, and in the decade following 9/11, the relationship between the two countries, though generally stable and predictable, has occasionally been turbulent.



In much of the literature that explores this unique relationship, scholars have identified in considerable detail, the similarities and differences between the two countries. Despite sharing the longest international border in the world – a border that stretches over 5,500 miles – historians, anthropologists, novelists, sociologists, economists and political scientists have wasted little time chronicling what makes the two countries unique. While the United States, the world’s remaining superpower, is often portrayed as an “exceptional” country intent on exporting “democracy” around the globe, Canada, a country with a larger land mass, but one-tenth the population, sees itself as a more peace loving, accommodating and less militaristic nation that tries to bring people together, not tear them apart. But for Patricia Molloy, despite Canada’s efforts to define itself and its citizens as passionate advocates of political and social justice, the Canadian government’s willingness to maintain good relations with its southern neighbour at virtually all cost has, at times, compromised the integrity and “moral superiority” of Canada’s domestic and foreign policy. By delving into several controversial incidents, including Canada’s failure to secure the expeditious release of suspected terrorist Syrian-born Canadian Maher Arar, and the tepid reaction of Canadian

officials to four of its soldiers killed by US friendly fire in Afghanistan, Canada has failed to hold the United States accountable for these and other injustices.

Why, Molloy asks, did Canadian policy-makers not pressure US officials to return Arar safely to Canada, and why was Canada prepared to accept the “American” version of events that led to the deaths of four of our soldiers? The conclusion Molloy reaches is simple, yet disturbing. Given the importance Canada assigns to maintaining its special relationship with the United States, Ottawa was not prepared to condemn US officials even when innocent Canadians were being tortured or killed. By remaining silent when such injustices were being committed, Molloy claims that Canada did little to distinguish itself from a country that its citizens and policy-makers often go to great lengths to vilify.

By examining how Canada and Canadians are depicted in literature, in popular culture, and in the mainstream media, Molloy makes a compelling argument that a considerable investment has been made in developing a national narrative that celebrates what makes Canada unique. Canada’s identity, Molloy observes, is deeply rooted in its official commitment to multiculturalism, its support for same- sex marriage (in at least a few provinces) and in its desire to promote global peace and security. Canadians and Americans may look alike, shop at the same clothing stores, listen to the same music, read the same books, and watch the same films, but how the two countries treat their citizens and interact with foreign countries is dramatically different. Or is it? Canada may take pride in its distinct national identity and in its condemnation of America’s domestic policy (e.g., health care) and foreign policy, but, as Molloy reveals, it is questionable how different the two countries really are.

As Molloy’s study unfolds, it becomes clear that Canada is a country that is struggling both to establish its “separateness” and maintain its strategic ties to the United States. Canadian officials have often questioned the Bush and Obama administrations’ commitment to thickening the Canada-US border, and might have taken great offense at the mere suggestion that several of the 9/11 hijackers slipped through Canadian land-border crossings into the United States. However, official Ottawa would not allow such attacks on its reputation to compromise the importance it assigns to the Canada-US relationship. Put simply, Canada can ill afford to jeopardize a partnership which generates \$1.5 billion in two-way trade each day. Through its silence and/or complicity with American officials in the so-called age of terror, bilingual Canada has, in many respects, revealed its bipolarity. Some would even suggest that Canada is not bipolar, but rather suffers from multiple personality disorders.

Molloy’s study does not resemble a conventional analysis of Canada-US relations, nor does it offer a standard treatment of the key issues that have come to dominate the bilateral agenda for decades. For those looking for an examination of the relationship between Canadian prime ministers and US presidents, or for an in-depth examination of the politics surrounding the negotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the ongoing softwood lumber dispute, they should turn to other studies in this growing field of interest. Yet, for a thoughtful and carefully reasoned critique of the “darker side” of Canada-US relations, Molloy’s treatise offers a unique foray into a discussion that rarely takes place in the public arena. What she has to say about Canada-US relations will not warm the hearts of those who admire this strong and enduring partnership, as President Kennedy did in his glowing tribute to Canada on a spring day in Ottawa over 50 years ago. But her distinctive voice deserves to be heard and her alarming message considered as Canada and the United States join forces in addressing potential regional and international threats.

Donald E. Abelson is Professor, Political Science, Director, Centre for American Studies, and Director, The Canada-US Institute at The University of Western Ontario in London, Canada. He is the author of several books including: *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes* (Second Edition, 2009), which has been translated into Simplified Chinese and Arabic; *A Capitol Idea: Think Tanks & US Foreign Policy* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006); and *American Think Tanks and their Role in US Foreign Policy* (Macmillan and St. Martin’s Press, 1996). His work has also appeared in over three dozen journals and edited collections. He is currently writing a book on the tensions that have either seriously

compromised or severed the relationship between conservative American think tanks and the more liberal universities where they are or were housed. [Read more reviews by Donald.](#)

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