INTRODUCTION

TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OF A DISORIENTING MOMENT IN THE HISTORY OF CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

RANDY BOSWELL

Randy Boswell is a journalism professor at Carleton University and a former senior national writer with Postmedia News who covered politics, science and culture while developing a unique specialization in stories about Canadian history. He has served as guest editor of numerous volumes of *Canadian Issues/Thèmes Canadiens* for the Association for Canadian Studies, including this present edition of the ACS's flagship publication.

At the present moment of extreme disruption in Canada-U.S. relations, with a trade war in full flame and the American president musing about annexing Canada as a "51st state," a storm-tossed Canadian mind searches for a place of mooring. My thoughts return to the days and weeks after the 9/11 terror attacks of 2001, hardly a time of calm waters in the world but a reminder of how Canada's metaphorical posture towards the U.S. was once "shoulder to shoulder" rather than "elbows up."

Remember the hospitality of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador towards so many stranded American airline passengers, the Canadians' instinctive act of friendship at the heart of the smash musical *Come from Away*. Remember how then-foreign minister John Manley was widely hailed – including in a Time cover story about Canada's "newsmaker of the year" – for so eloquently articulating in the midst of that epic crisis this country's deep ties and unalloyed solidarity with the stricken nation to the south.

Elevated to deputy prime minister for his skillful management of the crucial Canada-U.S. file in those dark days – for his impressive ability to "orchestrate a transformative moment in Canada's history," as *Time* put it – Manley embodied the strong feelings of kinship and compassion so many Canadians felt at that time towards their bruised and bloodied American cousins. And their tragedy was ours, too: 24 Canadians died alongside those thousands of Americans on September 11.

As a reporter in Ottawa, I was assigned to write about this nerdy local politician's meteoric rise as a sterling symbol of Canada's bilateral bond with America, his portrait now seen "against a backdrop of Canadian and American flags in the centrefold of *Time* magazine's northern edition."

That was just one moment, and the swell of emotion didn't last long. Disputes about border security and a more serious rupture between Canada and the U.S. over the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 would follow. But that time in the wake of 9/11 was a reminder of other shoulder-to-shoulder episodes in Canada-U.S. history – most notably, the D-Day landings in Normandy in June 1944, with our two nations respectively helping to turn the tide of the Second World War at Juno and Omaha beaches.

Now, here in early 2025, a dark cloud of animosity hangs over the 49th parallel. Hockey metaphors abound – "we won't back down from a fight" – American-made produce is shunned at grocery stores and snowbirds in record numbers *didn't* flock to Florida, while others flew home early.

There is widespread agreement, despite the bump in national pride, that this is not good. And there is widespread dismay that the U.S president could so quickly transform Canada's longstanding friendship with the U.S. (despite occasional differences) into a state of suspicion and even fear. We can only hope that this moment, too, is short-lived.

In this volume of essays, contributors were invited to share their thoughts and insights about the suddenly turbulent relations between Canada and the United States. More specifically, with the distantly historical War of 1812 as a reference point, it was noted that "since then, with some exceptions, Canada and the United States have maintained a long-standing relationship marked by shared borders, important commercial and cultural ties, and vital defence and national security partnerships… But with the reaction sparked by President Trump's incessant provocations, are we witnessing an important shift in the relationship? What might this change imply for our economic ties, border security and other aspects of our shared future?"

The response from our stellar lineup of writers explores all of this and much more. This edition of *Canadian Issues/Thèmes Canadiens* offers a range of visceral reactions, probing reflections and thoughtful strategizing as Canada's new Liberal government under Prime Minister Mark Carney – along with provincial and territorial premiers reeling from the imposition of U.S. tariffs on Canadian exports – charts a course through choppy boundary waters.

Historian **John English**, professor emeritus at the University of Waterloo, retraces Canada's gradual integration into a U.S.-dominated North American economy and security sphere following the Second World War. English observes how the relationship brought prosperity and protection but also occasional "nationalist outbursts" whenever Canadians worried their country's identity and independence might weaken under the America's eagle's wing. Now, an era English describes as Canada's long trip down the "American road" has definitively "come to an end."

Jack Jedwab, president of the Association for Canadian Studies and the Metropolis Institute, shares recent survey results showing a "record high negative view of the U.S." among Canadians and a startling number of citizens – one in five – who say they genuinely fear the possibility of a U.S. military invasion. "What makes it all the more frustrating," Jedwab notes, "is that over the course of Canada's history, it has been the United States that is widely seen as the country's closest ally." It's a perplexing

moment, to be sure, one that has Jedwab and many Canadians asking: "Is that what friends are for?"

Colin Robertson, the distinguished former diplomat and fellow of the Canadian Global Affairs Institute, states bluntly: "The tariffs are fracturing our economic partnership and forcing us to rethink what has been our most important relationship." But the best response, he makes clear, is to transform this deeply challenging moment into a "historic opportunity to put our own house in order" – dismantling internal trade barriers, "re-thinking collective security with allies" and carrying out an array of other self-examinations aimed at creating a stronger Canada: "Greater self-reliance will give Canada resiliency."

Journalist and think tank leader **Edward Greenspon**, the former editor-in-chief of *The Globe and Mail* and now co-chair of Deloitte's Future of Canada Centre, takes a deep dive into Canadian history and reminds us that the federal election in April – so squarely focused on U.S.-Canada relations – was preceded by many other votes that turned on the same issue. But he warns against letting "nationalistic anger" blaze out of control. We need to work hard maintain access to the massive American market, he argues, even as we diversify our trade relationships and revitalize our economic strategies. "Our neighbour's proclivity for arbitrary measures must be reconciled with our inescapable geographic location atop North America," Greenspon cautions.

Political scientist and author **Dr. Debra Thompson**, the Canada Research Chair in Racial Inequality in Democratic Societies at McGill University, examines the cross-border impacts of Donald Trump's "war on woke" and how his government's "outright assault" on diversity, equity and inclusion programs in the U.S. amounts to a "conservative counterrevolution" that is challenging recent advances made by a host progressive movements. "But Canadians are not simply reacting to the happenings south of the border," Thompson warns. "A rising tide of homegrown, locally inflected, inextricably Canadian anti-DEI sentiment is already upon us." From the so-called "Freedom Convoy" occupation of Ottawa in early 2022 to the "fracturing" of public support in Canada for immigration and multiculturalism, Thompson sees reasons for alarm in this country as Trump carries out his ideological purge in the U.S.

Former U.S. diplomat **David Rovinsky**, secretary of the Association for Canadian Studies in the United States, offers a "Trump's eye view of Canada" that highlights the U.S. president's fascination with "Gilded Age" American expansionism and protectionism more than a century ago. "Trump's invocation of annexation may seem surprising," Rovinsky writes, "but it is not without historical precedent. It is merely another facet of his broader nostalgia for late 19th-century American politics." Trump's "51st state" bluster is an echo, he argues, of the Manifest Destiny doctrine fueled by the notion that "U.S. territorial growth was inevitable and justified." The level of danger facing Canada, Rovinsky observes, will depend on the degree to which "Trump weaponizes his expansionist rhetoric."

Janice Stein, the Belzberg Professor of Conflict Management and the founding Director of the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto, emphasizes that in the face of the Trump threat to Canada's industry and independence, the wisest strategy is "to look to the future and make

the investments in technology and productivity that will shape the next-generation economies." While warning that it would be "foolhardy" for Canadians not to take Trumpian talk of a "51st state" seriously, she said the U.S. remains a vital market for Canadian goods and a key ally: "Our relationship with the United States will always be important to us." But a primary objective for this country, she insists, must be to succeed in building greater trust in government and other public institutions to avoid the kind of undermining of democracy unfolding south of the border. "We see the price of failure when we watch, mesmerized in horror, at what is happening in the United States, our closest neighbour and friend."

Journalist and author **Andrew Cohen**, an adjunct professor at Carleton University and a specialist in Canada-U.S. relations, closes our conversation with a modest proposal addressed directly to the U.S. president, and boldly titled: "An Appeal to Donald Trump: Join Us!" For any Canadian who has endured Trump's unrelenting and uninformed bombast in recent months about taking over our country, the skewering that Cohen administers in the form of an earnest invitation for the U.S. to become part of Canada is wonderfully therapeutic. "As Canadians, you'll inherit the Far North," he tells Trump. "No need to take it from us, as you've been threatening. Now we'll be one happy family, extending from the Gulf of Canada to the Sea of Gretzky."