



## PREFACE: THE “OTHER” BORDER AND THE PRESENT MOMENT

I write this now at the conclusion of the second week of Donald Trump’s second term as President of the United States and in the wake of Justin Trudeau’s recent announcement of his resignation as Canadian Prime Minister. This issue of *RIAS* would be of considerable significance regardless of these developments; however, recent events render it even more poignant. Trump has escalated tensions by threatening Canada with substantial trade tariffs and has even entertained the notion of incorporating Canada as a state within the United States. While tariffs—particularly those directed against China—were central to his 2024 presidential campaign, the idea of annexing Canada was notably absent. It remains unclear whether these pronouncements constitute mere negotiating tactics or genuine policy objectives. Nevertheless, these threats are accompanied by equally audacious assertions, including proposals to purchase Greenland from Denmark and to reclaim the Panama Canal through military force, if necessary. Such claims may appear implausible, yet Trump seems unequivocally serious in his rhetoric.

This moment represents a profound rupture in US-Canada relations—one that is both shocking and paradoxical. On the one hand, Trump’s rhetoric undermines Canadian sovereignty, diminishing the nation’s standing. On the other hand, he simultaneously extends an ostensible “invitation” for Canada to join the United States as its fifty-first state. His statements are reminiscent of his admiration for the expansionist policies of President William McKinley, whose tenure at the turn of the twentieth century has been largely absent from contemporary American political discourse. Trump’s glorification of McKinley’s legacy—particularly the expansionist ambitions

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culminating in the 1898 Cuban-Spanish-American War, which saw the US assert control over Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines—further signals a revival of American imperial rhetoric. The day before Trump’s inauguration on January 20, 2025, Fareed Zakaria, a prominent US-based commentator (whom I regard as largely centrist), devoted significant airtime on CNN to these statements, characterizing them as an overt return to US expansionism.

As the co-editors elaborate in their introduction to this issue, the US-Mexico border has historically been regarded as the primary site of border-related tensions, while the US-Canada border has been perceived as largely unproblematic. Indeed, within American Border Studies, the concept of “the border” is almost invariably associated with the US-Mexico divide. One might ask whether the long-standing difficulties surrounding the southern border stem from the divergent ways in which Canadians and Mexicans are perceived in the US imaginary. At the 2018 International Forum for US Studies (IFUSS) conference—which laid the groundwork for the scholarship in this issue—co-editor Jane Desmond articulated her suspicion that, in the American consciousness, “Canada is tacitly assumed to be a largely ‘white’ nation—full of people from England who still revere a queen” (Desmond). This assumption significantly informs the differential treatment of the US-Canada and US-Mexico borders. While I concur with Desmond’s assessment, she rightly urges further inquiry into the persistence of such representations, particularly given that Canada has always been home to Indigenous and Métis populations, as well as migrants and refugees from a wide array of backgrounds.

This issue, therefore, is of critical importance. Its scope is broad, its approach interdisciplinary, and its thematic concerns both historical and contemporary. Featuring contributions from scholars representing various countries, it foregrounds what it aptly terms the United States’ “other” border. The fact that its contributors hail from beyond the US and Canada is particularly noteworthy and reflects the longstanding mission of IFUSS to cultivate diverse perspectives on American Studies.

Since its inception in 1995 at the University of Iowa—funded by a substantial Rockefeller Foundation grant—IFUSS has been committed to fostering rigorous scholarship on the United States by scholars working outside its borders. The organization has provided residencies for dozens of such scholars, published journals and books beyond US borders, and facilitated international collaborations through roundtables, panels, structured dialogues, and conferences. Its mission has consistently been to highlight the extensive scholarly engagement with the United States beyond its own institutions, par-

ticularly in non-English-speaking regions, a body of work too often overlooked by US-based scholars.

Canada is, of course, one such country of critical interest to IFUSS. Yet, for many in the US, its geographical proximity, linguistic hegemony of the English language, and relative political stability (particularly in contrast with Mexico) render it simultaneously easy to ignore and, paradoxically, easy to imagine as an extension of the United States. IFUSS has engaged with Canadian scholars in the past, but the present collaboration—between Jasmin Habib (University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada) and Jane Desmond (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where IFUSS is currently headquartered)—represents an unprecedented degree of intellectual partnership.

This issue features contributions from scholars working across disciplines, including political economy, social history, and cultural studies. Its relevance is pressing. More precisely, it interrogates the significance of the US-Canada border across historical contexts, particularly during periods of stark policy divergence on issues such as slavery, immigration, Indigenous rights, wildlife conservation, and multilingualism. Given the recent escalation of political rhetoric and punitive economic measures between the two nations, this thematic issue of *RIAS* on the “Other” Border could not be more timely or consequential.

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*Abstract:* This thematic issue of *RIAS* explores the evolving dynamics of US-Canada relations amidst the backdrop of Donald Trump’s second presidential term and Justin Trudeau’s resignation as Canadian Prime Minister. The issue gains heightened relevance due to Trump’s provocative rhetoric, including threats of economic tariffs, discussions of annexation, and broader expansionist ambitions. The US-Canada border has historically been viewed as stable compared to the US-Mexico border, yet this assumption is being challenged. The issue examines how the US imagines Canada, often overlooking its Indigenous and multicultural realities, and interrogates historical and contemporary border tensions. Featuring interdisciplinary perspectives from scholars in Canada, the US, and beyond, the issue contextualizes current political shifts by addressing historical policies on immigration, Indigenous rights, and cultural representation. Through its engagement with global American studies, this issue underscores the necessity of examining US-Canada relations from multiple international perspectives.

*Keywords:* US-Canada relations, Trump administration, annexation rhetoric, Border Studies, US-Canada border, expansionism, International Forum for US Studies (IFUSS), *Review of International American Studies*

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## WORKS CITED

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