

ISSUE 22 · AUTUMN 2008
MYTH & LEGACY

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49th Parallel is an interdisciplinary e-journal devoted to American and Canadian studies and looks to promote innovative and challenging academic work. The journal is keen to encourage dialogues and debates which transcend the boundaries of customary theoretical approaches to the culture, history, and politics of the North American continent.

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Note From the Editors

On taking office, it is customary for each new administration to set out their unique vision, to assert their capacity to shape the world to that vision, and to stake a bold claim to a brighter, better future...

In keeping with this tradition, the new editors of an 'all-new' 49th Parallel would therefore like to make a few explanatory comments about our Autumn edition. As you may have gathered, we have made some substantial changes to the style and format of the journal. Beyond the obvious aesthetic motivation, this is intended to reflect our editorial emphasis on interdisciplinary innovation, especially the journal's position at the intersection of history, culture and politics. The aim is to weave some sort of coherence and thematic identity through the diverse topics covered in each edition. As a consequence of this approach, 49th Parallel is now available for download not only as separated articles, but as a complete pdf e-journal. In addition, the layout of the articles has been designed to make screen reading a pleasure and to allow the easy printing and binding of individual papers. We hope we have succeeded in these ambitions but we depend, of course, on the judgment and feedback of our readers. Therefore, please feel free to email us at 49thparallel@bham.ac.uk with your comments, suggestions, critiques, rants and occasional praise.

The theme for the current issue, Myth & Legacy, has emerged (with not too excessive contrivance) from the convenient convergence of the US Presidential elections with the largely political subject matter of this

edition's papers. Yet this theme extends even to those with a more cultural focus.

Presidential elections, and especially this one, are times when political myths are being mobilised, constructed, reinvented and challenged according to the political agenda and particular 'cultural constituency' of each candidate. They are also a time when the legacy of the out-going President is being subjected to a public post-mortem. These processes are intertwined as each candidate attempts to self-define as the solution to past failures and the 'keeper' of past promises. Yet the theme of 'myth management' and legacy construction (and deconstruction) has a wider relevance to the role of the United States in the world, and to this Autumn's harvest of papers.

Paul Cammack's paper directly addresses the legacy of US leadership in the world and the mythology of democracy promotion that has supported it by dissecting Joseph Nye's concept of 'smart' power. Robert Pee shows how Reagan's 'crusade for democracy', and the founding of the National Endowment for Democracy, was intended to continue US strategies of Political Warfare while distancing them from the uncomfortable legacy of the CIA's meddling at home and around the world. Cameron Gordon's piece sets out to test the rhetorical myths of LBJ's 'Great Society' against the social impact of the 'War on Poverty'. Finally, Dan Colson deals with the use of powerful cultural myths, through the teaching of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, to construct and enforce social norms of sexual identity and behaviour.

C.E., E.G., R.O.