

[Back to index](#)

North of the 49th Parallel: A Call to Canadianists

As editors involved in the development of a new journal, especially one in a new medium, we are all particularly keen to receive feedback expressing an interest or an opinion in a particular article or the journal as a whole. We recently received one particular e-mail that we all felt deserved to be published on the site.

To: "49thparallel@bham.ac.uk" <49thparallel@bham.ac.uk>
Subject: letter to the editor
Date sent: Tue, 1 Jun 1999 15:02:18 -0400

Dear Sirs,

I enjoyed reviewing the 49th Parallel site, and reading the various articles posted there. I realise that yours is a recent project, and that the shape of your publication will change as you publish further issues. My only comment on the content is that, for a "North American" journal, the 49th Parallel seems to focus much more on the US than on Canada. As students at the Department of American and Canadian Studies, you are, no doubt, familiar with the infamous Canadian preoccupation with being overlooked in favour of our neighbours. I note that the members of your editorial board focus their studies on American subjects, and so are naturally inclined to focus on the United States. However, I believe there is much to be learned from Canada's unique political and social reality. Indeed, in light of the current British government's policy of constitutional devolution, Canada offers a number of lessons on which policies to follow and which to avoid. I urge you to consider including more material on Canada in the future.

Sincerely,

M. Sims
Toronto, Ontario

We acknowledge that Mr. Sims makes an extremely valid point. The second edition of 49th Parallel contained no specifically Canadian content at all. However, we do not want to give the impression that we are not interested in Canadian Studies, which is why we have chosen to use Mr. Sims' letter to attempt to redress the balance. By explaining the factors that govern our content, we hope that more students of Canadian Studies of all kinds may be urged to come forward and contribute to our ever growing project.

As postgraduate students from the Department of American and Canadian Studies at the University of Birmingham, we naturally decided from the outset to include work relating to both the United States and Canada. In fact, for our first edition we specifically decided that at least one of the articles must be "Canadian" in content, and we also included a review relating to Canadian politics. We believed that the contents of the first edition would reflect the balance that we hoped would continue through further editions.

Nevertheless, while the postgraduate community of our Department grows year by year, the number of research students looking at Canada, be it history or literature, society or film, is proportionally small. (The proportion is similarly small for academic staff.) As we were trying to get this project off the ground we initially acquired most of our submissions through academic communities of which we were already a part. So when it came to looking for content we had a very small pool of "in-house" Canadianists to turn to, most of whom were already engaged with prior commitments.

Despite our subsequent efforts at promotion, our submissions have come almost entirely from Americanists. This is not to say that we have had no interest from Canada; a number of people have contacted us expressing an interest in contributing Canadian content, but despite our encouragement we have heard nothing more from them. While it is true that the research interests of our Editorial Board lie largely (but not entirely) in the United States, we have published no articles so far that directly match our

interests, which hopefully indicates that we want our journal to cover a broad range. (We also realise that a journal based solely around our personal research interests would neither generate much response nor last very long.)

We realise that there are other issues involved that explain why we get more interest from below the 49th Parallel. There are issues regarding the nature of postgraduate research and the way in which it is supported and funded in Canada, and there are clearly more graduate schools in the United States than in Canada. Nevertheless, these factors do not explain scholars' personal interests and their overwhelming preference to study the United States over Canada. The comparative number of graduate schools in the US and Canada does not explain the comparative difference between Americanists and Canadianists in academic departments in this country. While this is not an attempt to be controversial, we would have no complaints if it were to stir some interest out there. We would be all too willing to publish a well-argued defence of why Canadian history is more dynamic than American history, or why Canadian literature is more significant than that emanating from south of the border.

Not that such questions affect our editorial policy. We will be all too happy to publish both articles and reviews relating to Canada, but we have to receive them first. We will continue to send out information regarding the journal, include a call for papers on our site, and send out calls to various relevant H-Net lists in the hope of creating further interest, from both Canadianists and Americanists. Hopefully by highlighting the relative lack of interest, we will see more articles and reviews on a number of Canadian issues, or even responding to this one. Questions of how Canada sees itself in relation to the United States and vice versa are exactly the sort of issues that would we like raise on this site, but work does not have to contain the words 'United States' to get our attention. Besides, it took so long to come up with the name 49th Parallel for this journal that we would hate to have to change it through lack of interest.