

11-1-2014

**Richard Dean Burns, Joseph M. Siracusa, and Jason C. Flanagan.
American Foreign Relations since Independence. Santa Barbara:
ABC-Clio, Praeger, 2013.**

Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang
Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, thuyhang032003@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hang, Nguyen Thi Thuy (2014) "Richard Dean Burns, Joseph M. Siracusa, and Jason C. Flanagan. American Foreign Relations since Independence. Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, Praeger, 2013.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 6 : No. 1 , Article 18.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol6/iss1/18>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of International and Global Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact phuffman@lindenwood.edu.

Richard Dean Burns, Joseph M. Siracusa, and Jason C. Flanagan. *American Foreign Relations since Independence*. Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, Praeger, 2013.

American Foreign Relations since Independence, published in 2013, is a one-volume history that brings together the collective knowledge of three generations of diplomatic historians: Richard Dean Burns, Professor Emeritus of History at California State University, Joseph M. Siracusa, Professor of Human Security and International Diplomacy at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, and Jason C. Flanagan, Assistant Professor in International Studies at the University of Canberra. The book offers insight into the key events and significant ideas that have moulded American diplomacy since the Revolutionary War and examines historical factors that have substantially influenced American debates and commitments in the Middle East, Europe, and Asia since that time. With the belief that to understand the present, we must first understand the past, as the past is still with us, the authors argue that the issues currently confronted by the United States in its attempts to advance American national interests and increase American security in the 21st century can be best understood as merely the latest demonstration of perennial foreign policy, rather than being exclusive to the present day. Exploring and investigating the complexity of American policies and comparing such policies to national interests and the limits of American power, the authors openly question the continuing debates about isolationism versus internationalism. They argue convincingly that the main feature of American foreign relations from the Founding Fathers to the present age has been the constant tension between the American endeavor to engage with the world and the American intention to avoid involving itself in world issues.

The book is organized into eighteen chronological chapters. The first four chapters focus on the struggle for American independence and the establishing of the American sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere. Chapter one, "The Diplomacy of the Revolution," describes in detail how the American colonies started to explore the possibility of independence from Britain. Chapter two, "The New Republic in a World at War," argues that American diplomacy after the Revolution, based on neutrality outlined by the founders of the Early Republic, helped the United States extract advantages from the tensions among European powers. Chapter three, "The War of 1812: Re-establishing American Independence," illustrates that "no feature of Anglo-American relations in the nineteenth century was more striking than [the realization] that there were better methods than war for settling disputes between the two countries" (p.38). American diplomats smartly used arbitration to defend their sovereignty and settled Anglo-American conflict. Chapter four, "The Monroe Doctrine and Latin American Independence," highlights American determination to remain in isolation with respect to world politics. The authors explain in detail the circumstances behind the origins of these non-colonization and non-interference principles.

The next five chapters offer insight into American diplomacy intended to extend its boundaries and increase its power. Chapter five, "Manifest Destiny Triumphant: Oregon, Texas, and California," examines American diplomatic activities meant to expand its size by two-thirds, pushing the United States' border westward to the Pacific and southward to the Rio Grande. Chapter six, "A House Divided: Diplomacy during the Civil War," depicts American diplomacy in the Civil War. The authors reveal that one of the most significant victories won by the United States in the American Civil War was never fought on a battlefield. Rather, it was a series of diplomatic victories that prevented the Confederate States of America from being recognized by any foreign governments. Chapter seven, "Territorial and Commercial Expansionism: Alaska, the Caribbean, and the Far East," points

out how all administrations from Ulysses S. Grant to William McKinley sought to acquire further territories and expand the United States' foreign markets. Chapter eight, "War with Spain and the New Manifest Destiny," deals with the Spanish-American War and the American acquisition of a colonial empire in the Caribbean and the Pacific. The authors argue that that war brought the United States the power to assume unprecedented imperial responsibilities and become a world leader. Such American power and influence were described in chapter nine, "The United States Adjusts to Its New Status," with a detailed analysis of American diplomacy intended to dominate the Caribbean, lead the Far East, and participate in European affairs. The authors convincingly argue that the United States, under the Theodore Roosevelt administration, held a new attitude: looking outward and adapting to the world.

The continuity of such an attitude in American foreign relations is carefully depicted in Chapters 10 through 13. Chapter 10, "Woodrow Wilson and a World at War," shows how the United States, under President Wilson, responded to the breakout of the First World War and analyzes Wilson's diplomatic choices in this period. Chapter 11, "The Slow Death of Versailles," painted the picture of American diplomatic activities during the interwar period. The United States realized that self-imposed isolation could not defend the country. Chapter 12, "World War II: The Grand Alliance," argues that isolationism became silenced in the United States. The elaborate neutrality legislation of the 1930s could not stop American involvement in the war in Europe and Asia. Chapter 13, "A New Global Struggle: Founding of the UN to the Cold War," examines the origins of the United Nations and reveals the drifts in the Grand Alliance, which finally itself became a new conflict, a "Cold War," driven by the United States' fear of Soviet expansionism and the potential "domino effect," in which other nations would, as a result of Soviet expansion, fall into Communist leadership.

The next four chapters provide a full picture of American foreign policy from the 1950s to early 1990s. Chapter 14, "Crises, Conflicts, and Coexistence," touches on how the Cold War flourished in Asia and Europe from the 1950s to the 1970s. The chapter highlights that it was the terrifying prospect of a nuclear war amid the rush between the superpowers to achieve nuclear parity that ultimately forced the United States and the Soviet Union to begin meaningful arms control activity and reach a temporary *détente*. Chapter 15, "The United States and Southeast Asia: Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam," analyzes the American policy of containing communism in Southeast Asia and reveals how the United States was gradually drawn into the hostilities in Southeast Asia. Chapter 16, "Reagan, Bush, Gorbachev, and the End of the Cold War," critically investigates U.S.-Soviet relations under the Reagan and Bush administrations and how the Cold War came to an end. Chapter 17, "The United States and the Middle East: Israel, Lebanon, Iran, and Iraq," examines how the relations between the Arab states and the United States since the Second World War have characteristically been moulded by competing and contradictory factors, often influenced by the Arab-Israel conflict. The authors point out that Washington was confused while attempting to formulate and implement a policy that could best serve America's interests in the Middle East. The last chapter, "Twenty-First-Century Challenges," discusses terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and wars as the major challenges facing the United States in the twenty-first century.

Although there is already abundant academic literature on American external relations, *American Foreign Relations since Independence* represents a solid attempt, as a collective contribution from a historical approach, to comprehend American foreign policy since the nation was created. In a surprisingly brief book for its subject matter and stated objective – at 446 pages – the three authors successfully take readers through a historical excursion of American foreign relations and convincingly illustrate the permanent tension inherent to the American desire to play a role in the international system while equally strongly endeavoring to remain insulated from the world's troubles.

Taken as a whole, *American Foreign Relations since Independence* appears as a fair assessment of the relationship between American foreign policies and the country's national interests, particularly with respect to the limits of national power. After considering all aspects of American international involvement, the authors accurately indicate that the discussion of American foreign policy cannot simply be represented by the binary positioning of isolationism versus internationalism. The main lessons to learn from the successes and failures in the history of American diplomacy, say the authors, is that the United States should not think that its institutions and values are superior to those of other nations, nor should it react to developments in international affairs unilaterally.

It is difficult to summarize the foreign policy history of a nation in a short text, yet the authors have succeeded in producing a comprehensive and cohesive historical account of the main events and salient ideas that have moulded the American diplomatic experience since the Revolution. Such a text is significant to history, and the authors deserve credit for the book they have written. The narrative is straightforward, and the analysis is easy to understand, and the authors support their conclusions well. This solid and concise piece of scholarship should be of great value for modern American history courses, foreign policy surveys, and international politics classes. However, the one glaring weakness is that as a synthesis, there is little new research added to the scholarship of American foreign relations history. Additionally, a small suggestion for the next edition of the book is that it should ideally include a glossary of the IR terms used throughout the chapters. Such a glossary would be a useful tool for general interest readers who have not mastered IR terms the way students and scholars of global politics must do.

Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang
Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam
thuyhang032003@gmail.com