

**GRAHAM, Gerald S., *The Maritime Struggle for North America*.
University of Toronto Press: 1950; Issued under the auspices of
the Canadian Institute of International Affairs. Pp. XIII, 338**

Gordon O. Rothney

Volume 4, numéro 2, septembre 1950

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/801646ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/801646ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française

ISSN

0035-2357 (imprimé)

1492-1383 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Rothney, G. O. (1950). Compte rendu de [GRAHAM, Gerald S., *The Maritime Struggle for North America*. University of Toronto Press: 1950; Issued under the auspices of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs. Pp. XIII, 338]. *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 4(2), 291–293.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/801646ar>

GRAHAM, Gerald S., *The Maritime Struggle for North America*. University of Toronto Press: 1950; Issued under the auspices of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs. Pp. XIII, 338.

Gerald S. Graham is Rhodes Professor of Imperial History in the University of London, England. A native of Ontario, he is a graduate of Queen's University, Kingston, and of Cambridge University, England. In 1942 he entered the Canadian armed services and in 1945 he joined the Historical section of the Canadian Army. In 1947 he received an appointment in the University of London, and in 1948 he was promoted to the Rhodes Chair at King's College, London.

This book "is concerned chiefly with three centuries of European rivalry and expansion". The title of the first chapter is "The Supremacy of Spain", while the last chapter describes "The End of the *Pax Britannica*". In between, much of the book is devoted to the struggle between Britain and France for North America. Dr. Graham finds throughout that "in the long run, statecraft has remained the most potent determinant, and naval history, so-called, is essentially political and diplomatic history".

The author explains why, until the English defeat of the Armada (1588), "Spanish sea power resting on Caribbean bases was the determining force in the preliminary European conflict for North America". Then the basic reason why North America was to become British and not French soon emerges. Thanks to the English Channel, British governments showed greater constancy than did the French in building fleets. "The age-old rivalry of Bourbon and Hapsburg... made French sea power a thing of intermittent enthusiasms."

Louis XIV failed to appreciate the importance of superiority at sea. His policy of *guerre de course* "might mean the ravaging of St. John's or the sudden capture of Fort York, but it could not prevent... Phips from reaching the ramparts of Quebec". While English overseas trade gradually expanded, by the end of the reign of Louis XIV, that of France had, "for all practical purposes, ceased to exist".

Yet, "the French continued to build their empire without securing it by sea". And French ministers agreed with Montesquieu that "l'effet des colonies est d'affaiblir le pays d'où on les tire, sans peupler ceux où on les envoie". "It was not, however, until Pitt won control of government, that the conquest of Canada became an avowed object of British strategy". Then, in 1759, Quebec fell simply because command of the sea meant "the ability to bar the enemy's access to his own overseas possessions".

In the American Revolution, however, the dominating factor in Britain's failure, says Professor Graham, was political isolation. Unable to secure a single European ally, she was outmatched at sea by the combined forces of France and Spain. But after 1805, "Napoleon returned to the old strategy of *guerre de course*"; and the United States' adventure of 1812 failed because it never jeopardized British command of the sea. As a result, during the "age of iron and steam" which followed, Britain's ships were able to carry her manufactures "to every corner of the earth". In 1900 the British navy was still "predominant in every ocean of the world". But by 1913 "it was predominant only in the North Sea". In 1914 and 1939 "both France and Britain needed the support of North American resources".

The book contains seven maps of parts of Canada and of France, and a good index. It conforms throughout to the highest standards of historical objectivity. It is of extreme importance, not merely to students of French America, but to students of world history. For the unity of western Europe and North America has been based on "the indivisibility of a great ocean

that has remained constant from the days of the Cabots to the new era of the long-distance bomber”.

Gordon O. ROTHNEY,
Sir George Williams College, Montreal.