

Book Notes: The Middle Power Project Canada and the Founding of the United Nations, by Adam Chapnick

Valerie Culp

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Citation Information

Culp, Valerie. "Book Notes: The Middle Power Project Canada and the Founding of the United Nations, by Adam Chapnick." *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 44.4 (2006) : 773-774.
<http://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/ohlj/vol44/iss4/9>

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BOOK NOTES

THE MIDDLE POWER PROJECT: CANADA AND THE FOUNDING OF THE UNITED NATIONS. BY ADAM CHAPNICK. VANCOUVER: UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA PRESS, 2005. Pp. 210. Notes, bibliography, index. \$85.00 hardcover.¹

BY VALERIE CULP

In *The Middle Power Project*, Adam Chapnick chronologically outlines Canadian officials' involvement in the major events leading up to the United Nations Conference on International Organization, held in San Francisco in 1945, placing Canada's efforts within the context of other international players. Chapnick posits that Canada was not the leading middle power during these years that previous commentators have made it out to be: in essence, Canada's international standing in the creation of the United Nations has been overstated.

Throughout his analysis, Chapnick demonstrates the limited influence of Canada amongst the great powers during the planning process from 1940 to 1945. The formation of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in 1943, for example, set the precedent for the future United Nations. Prime Minister Mackenzie King had hoped for a greater role for Canada within the UNRRA by holding a seat on the policy committee, but he was forced to compromise with a position on the supply committee. Chapnick shows how in the events leading up to the San Francisco Conference, Canadians were often left on the outside looking in, while the big powers led the planning efforts. Despite this, Canadians believed that Canada was playing an increasingly important role in world affairs.

Although Canadian officials held differing conceptions of Canada's proper place in world affairs, Canadian officials attempted to advance a "middle power" position, a vision which included a special position for the moderately powerful states, such as Canada, on the

¹ [*The Middle Power Project*].

United Nations Security Council. In reality, the Mackenzie King government was not willing to extend its global obligations unconditionally, and growing conflicts between the great powers marginalized the interests of the smaller states. At the San Francisco Conference, Canada adopted a cautious, moderate approach, and Chapnick argues that the country failed to emerge as a leader of the middle powers at the conference. Canadians, however, perceived themselves as an important middle power and took pride in this new status. Chapnick asserts that even though Canada's role may have been overestimated, this should not detract from how this period impacted Canada as a nation. "Instead of assessing the significance of this period in terms of how Canada changed the world," he states, "it is time to consider more carefully how planning a new world order changed Canada."²

In *The Middle Power Project*, Chapnick offers an important perspective in reassessing Canada's role in the formation of the United Nations. His exhaustive use of foreign sources adds context, and his weaving in of personal accounts and correspondence demonstrates how Canadian personalities shaped the country's foreign affairs policy during this time period.
