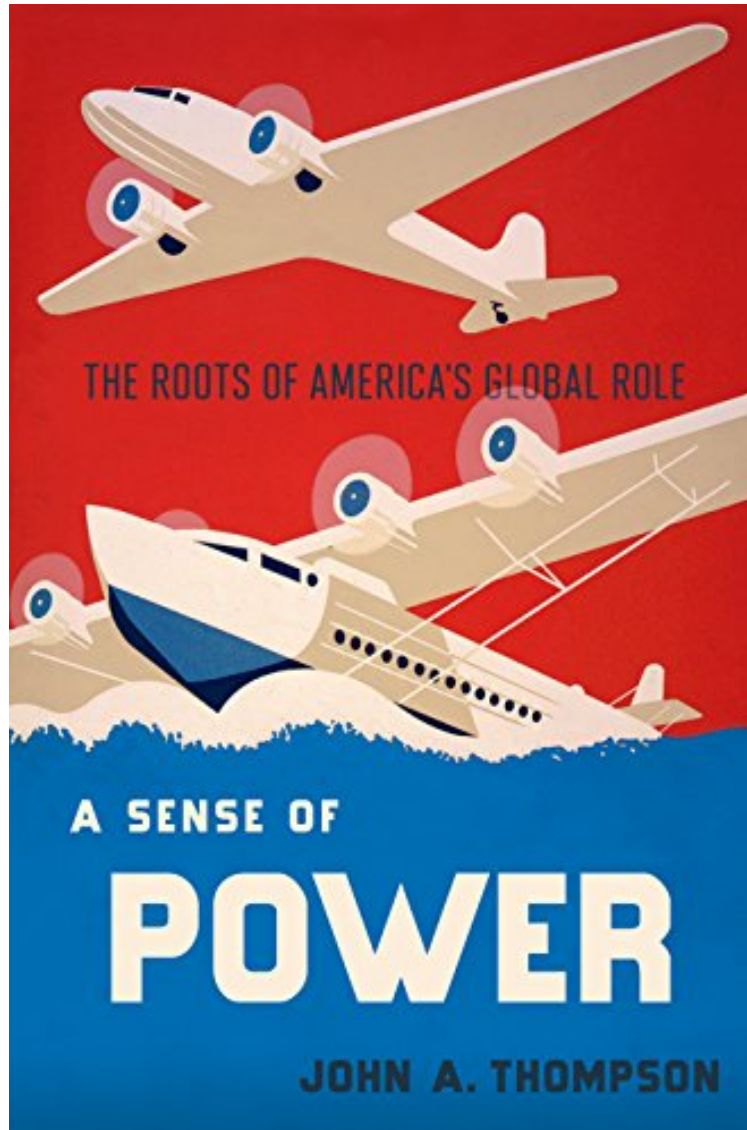


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A Sense of Power: The Roots of America's World Role

John A. Thompson

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John A. Thompson : A Sense of Power: The Roots of America's World Role before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Sense of Power: The Roots of America's World Role:

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Interesting and Important Book for our Times
By Customer
A sense of Power is a very readable, and sometimes, gripping, history of American foreign policy. For a general reader, like myself, it helps explain the evolution of thought that gave rise to the assumption of the global role America now plays, and illuminates it what happened, why and when during the time between the late 1800's and the Korean War. And many parts of it seem particularly relevant, given today's political debates. I found it a great read and would recommend it highly.

Why has the United States assumed so extensive and costly a role in world affairs over the last hundred years? The two most common answers to this question are "because it could" and "because it had to." Neither answer will do, according to this challenging re-assessment of the way that America came to assume its global role. The country's vast economic resources gave it the capacity to exercise great influence abroad, but Americans were long reluctant to meet the costs of wielding that power. Neither the country's safety from foreign attack nor its economic well-being required the achievement of ambitious foreign policy objectives. In *A Sense of Power*, John A. Thompson takes a long view of America's dramatic rise as a world power, from the late nineteenth century into the post-World War II era. How, and more importantly why, has America come to play such a dominant role in world affairs? There is, he argues, no simple answer. Thompson challenges conventional explanations of America's involvement in World War I and World War II, seeing neither the requirements of national security nor economic interests as determining. He shows how American leaders from Wilson to Truman developed an ever more capacious understanding of the national interest, and why by the 1940s most Americans came to support the price tag, in blood and treasure, attached to strenuous efforts to shape the world. The beliefs and emotions that led them to do so reflected distinctive aspects of U.S. culture, not least the strength of ties to Europe. Consciousness of the nation's unique power fostered feelings of responsibility, entitlement, and aspiration among the people and leaders of the United States. This original analysis challenges some widely held beliefs about the determinants of United States foreign policy and will bring new insight to contemporary debates about whether the nation should—or must—play so active a part in world politics.

"For readers unacquainted with the history of American foreign policy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Thompson's work will serve as a deeply informative introduction, one that successfully walks the fine line between dry academic reportage and trivia-based "popular" history. As a historian rather than a political scientist, Thompson is perhaps ideologically predisposed towards demonstrating the complexity of the world through the lens of individual events rather than concerned with objective, generalizable relationships between larger, transhistorical variables. Were this to be Thompson's true, unstated goal, then the value of his historical explanation would only increase, even as the value of his theoretical edifice would recede even further." — Alexander Kirss, *The National Interest* (May 12, 2016)
"Thompson has written a provocative, thoughtful overview of U.S. foreign policy from the 1890s to the 1950s. In a non-polemical manner, Thompson vividly outlines many shortcomings in the realist and revisionist critiques of American foreign policy. He cogently and skillfully reviews the literature, raises the level of debate, and offers a wise and thoughtful analysis of his own." — Melvyn P. Leffler, *H-Diplo* (May 2016)
"As the liberal historian John Thompson shows in *A Sense of Power*, it was neither the threat that the Germans and Japanese posed to the US mainland that drove the country into the war, nor the imperative to secure international markets, since the US economy in the 1940s was overwhelmingly based on domestic growth and consumption. The chief motive behind America's entry into the war, Thompson argues persuasively, was that its leaders realised that it would cost them relatively little to bend the world in the political direction they wanted." — Thomas Meaney, *London of Books* (July 14, 2106)
"*A Sense of Power* is a deft, literary, and persuasive analysis of America's twentieth-century evolution from the world's largest neutral nation to its most interventionist. Coming from a British observer and a historian of the Progressive Era who brings a fresh eye to foreign policy, it is more piquant and original than the title suggests." — Elizabeth Cobbs, *Passport* (September 2016)
"John A. Thompson is an experienced historian at the top of his game, and publication of his *A Sense of Power* is an important moment in the evolution of American diplomatic history. Thompson argues that America's rise to power is about just that: power. Realizing the rapid growth of their power as the twentieth century dawned, and appreciating its potential to effect change around the world in subsequent decades, he shows how American leaders actively chose to create a world order based on their system, their values, and their leadership. The American Century did not just happen. It came about because Americans were strong, and knew it." — Jeffrey A. Engel, Director of the Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University.
"Asking why the United States took up an encompassing global position despite significant costs, this wonderful analytical history appraises, challenges, and incorporates economic and security-centered understandings of capabilities and behavior. With deep learning, razor-sharp insight, and uncommon thoughtfulness, *A Sense of Power* offers a closely reasoned alternative, a process-centered interpretation that effectively embeds American foreign policy within democratic opinion and choice." — Ira Katznelson, Ruggles Professor of Political Science and History, Columbia University, author of *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*
"What motivates U.S. foreign policy? John A. Thompson provocatively argues that neither strategic nor economic factors have decisively shaped U.S. policy. Instead, he stresses the importance of power and the sense of responsibility that power bestows. Rarely has a historian

so luminously analyzed the factors shaping U.S. decision-making. This is a wonderful book that all students of international relations must read as they ponder the appropriate role of the United States in world affairs."?Melvyn P. Leffler, Edward Stettinus Professor of American History, University of Virginia, author of *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War*"In this elegantly written book by a seasoned observer of American foreign policy, we find an insightful explanation as to how the United States came to dominate world affairs in the twentieth century, an explanation based not so much either on 'realism' or on 'economic interests' (although these factors certainly counted) as on analysis and debate by the country's leaders as to the nation's place in the world. The book closes a full generation ago, but it raises a question very much still with us today: Will, better can, an equivalent 'sense of power' persist in the rapidly changing world of today? The discourse that shaped an earlier worldview remains dominant, but can it stay that way? This book offers no answer, but it points to the importance of debate within the United States as to its place in world affairs in a way that summons the present to recall its past so as to better contemplate its future."?Tony Smith, Cornelia M. Jackson Professor of Political Science, Tufts University"John A. Thompson's book is required reading for all those interested not only in how America rose to superpower status, but why it did so. In offering a new explanation for America's extraordinarily active role in world politics, he has made a major contribution to the historical debate."?Richard Fontaine, President of the Center for a New American Security

About the Author John A. Thompson is Emeritus Reader in American History at the University of Cambridge. He is the author of *Reformers and War: American Progressive Publicists and the First World War* and *Woodrow Wilson: A Profile in Power*.