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This edited collection, comprising essays by an array of established and emerging scholars from Europe and the United States, offers a fresh perspective on the history of transatlantic political networks and exchanges since 1800. Historians such as Daniel T. Rodgers have already shown how important such networks were in shaping the politics of the modern Atlantic world. To date, however, this field has been dominated by studies of the activities and ideas of progressive reformers, with a particular focus on the period 1870-1940, an era in which reform networks coalesced so as to fashion the world of ‘social politics’ so brilliantly depicted in Rodgers’s path-breaking study Atlantic Crossings (1998). The contributions gathered here challenge the chronological and ideological orientation of such work. They do so by collectively proposing a new periodization of modern transatlantic politics—one demonstrating the vitality and long-range significance both of early and mid-nineteenth, and of post-1945 interactions. At the same time, they illustrate the ideological heterogeneity of transatlantic political exchange, which encompassed a kaleidoscope of conservative, radical, and populist elements, in addition to the progressive and liberal currents about which so much has already been written”—Provided by publisher.

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Introduction

Daniel Scroop and Andrew Heath

Few works of history written in the last quarter century have been more influential than Daniel T. Rodgers’s *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age.*¹ Published in 1998, it brought late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century transnational reform into the historiographical spotlight, and made the Atlantic world—a field previously dominated by historians of early modern trade, empire, and slavery—into an area of study historians of modern social and political reform could also claim as their own. *Atlantic Crossings* was by no means the first attempt to investigate the reform networks that spanned the North Atlantic in the years between the 1870s and the Second World War. Intellectual historians made significant contributions to the study of modern transatlantic social and political thought as early as the 1950s, mapping ideational currents, charting reform networks, and pinpointing patterns of influence and exchange.² But there is little doubt that *Atlantic Crossings* is more comprehensive in coverage, more ambitious in scope, depth, and conceptual design, and more skilful in execution than any other comparable work. Heralded upon publication as a work of rare brilliance, it remains indispensable for any serious student of modern transatlantic reform.³

*Atlantic Crossings* is an innovative work of scholarship, but its great influence arguably stems less from its intrinsic novelty than from the fact that its arrival confirmed and consolidated a historiographical shift that was already well underway. This was particularly true, perhaps, in the United States where for half a century the Cold War bolstered and protected pre-existing exceptionalist tendencies in historical thinking. By the mid-1990s, however, the end of the Cold War and the emergence of new cultural, economic, and political developments associated with globalization combined to make narrowly nation-centered approaches to the study of political and social reform appear decidedly anachronistic. In an age of instant communication, rapid demographic change, and unprecedentedly volatile capital
flows, the idea of the United States as a bounded nation more or less impervious to outside influence lost evidential force. Responding to these changed circumstances, historians, unsurprisingly, began asking new sorts of questions about the past.4

For many scholars working in the fields of political culture, social change, and political reform, greater acceptance of the notion that the United States was shaped in fundamental ways by foreign ideas proved liberating.5 No longer in thrall to exceptionalism, they freed themselves from the grip of nation-centered history, and in this way helped to spawn the twenty-first century transnational history boom.6 Transnational history, its practitioners have noted, is as much a “way of seeing” as a rigid method.7 The shift in perspective brought hitherto unseen connections into view and revealed what Rodgers calls a “web of global interdependencies.”8 Today, such an approach is well-established, as a quick glance at job listings and journals reveals.9 But the battle to legitimize transnational history was far from won when Atlantic Crossings first appeared. When, in his prologue, Rodgers noted the permeability of all nations’ histories no matter how profound their exceptionalist convictions and self-understandings, he was making an important scholarly intervention.10

This volume presents a series of essays on the history of transatlantic politics over the past two centuries, all of which respond directly or indirectly to Atlantic Crossings. The essays here can be read individually as self-standing pieces that engage on their own terms with Rodgers’s work—and with the wider field of transatlantic history—while developing a distinct critique or perspective based on in-depth historical research on a particular topic or subtheme. They can also be read collectively, as an effort to interrogate and to contest some of the core assumptions of Atlantic Crossings, as well as to illuminate neglected areas of research. Of course they also testify to the continuing vibrancy in the twenty-first century of transatlantic and transnational intellectual exchange. The contributors to this collection work at universities based across North America and Europe, and range in their national origins from the United Kingdom to the United States, Spain, Germany, and France.

The essays presented here are organized chronologically and are divided into three parts. Part I covers the years 1800–1870, probing the character of transatlantic social politics in the era before Rodgers’s study begins. Part II focuses on what might be termed the “classic phase” of transatlantic reform, examining the same period—1870–1940—with which Atlantic Crossings is concerned. The studies in this section show that although Rodgers’s book was
unusually capacious, it was by no means comprehensive, and that its omissions are telling in both historical and historiographical terms. They expand and contest the boundaries of the multiple worlds of reform that animated the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Part III explores the post-1945 era, charting the emergence of new transatlantic politics of both the Right and the Left. It develops the theme of programmatic diversity introduced in Part II, expands the geographical range of the volume, and surveys the European reception of American ideas after the United States became a net exporter of policy. Two of the four essays in this section focus on Spain, a nation whose engagement in transatlantic politics is overlooked in Atlantic Crossings.

This collection is not the only attempt that has been made in recent times to reflect upon the significance of Atlantic Crossings, or for that matter to comment more broadly on the wave of transoceanic and transnational scholarship it helped to spawn. In addition to the initial rush of book reviews and symposia on Rodgers’s work that appeared around the millennium, in recent years transnational historians have produced a plethora of impressive methodological and state-of-the-field essays, which have done much to advance our understanding and to enrich our knowledge of what is still a fast-growing historical sub-discipline. The essays gathered here join those debates while also bringing new voices and fresh empirical research to light. More than that, however, the studies in this collection make two distinct intellectual contributions. First, they contest the periodization of Atlantic Crossings, demonstrating the vitality of the politics of transatlantic reform both before and after the period (1870–1940) covered by Rodgers. Second, they incorporate work on transatlantic networks operating across the political spectrum, rather than confining themselves to the study of progressives and other historical actors operating on the left and centre-left. The volume includes studies of conservative networks as well as research on modes of progressive and populist politics neglected in Atlantic Crossings.

This book stretches the chronological and programmatic parameters of Rodgers’s work but it keeps the Atlantic as its geographic setting. Given the “global turn” in historical writing over the last two decades, the Atlantic mooring might appear confining. In the 1990s, a venturesome historian of the Civil War would typically explore the conflict from the vantage point of Europe, but now, transnational scholarship in the field is as likely to look to Egypt and Mexico as the North Atlantic. Global history has sometimes emphasized the worldwide significance of the United States before its rise as a
superpower. The Civil War, indeed, is one of the few events to merit a sub-chapter of its own in C. A. Bayly’s *Birth of the Modern World*, whereas the English-translation of Jurgen Osterhammel’s Braudelian *Transformation of the World*—another monumental study of the long nineteenth century—appears in Princeton University Press’s “America in the World” series. Yet by showing how capital, labor, and ideas flowed in multiple directions, global historians have acknowledged, as Bayly puts it, that “[i]t is no longer really possible to write ‘European’ or ‘American’ history in a narrow sense.” New work on multinational organizations, meanwhile, has further weakened the stranglehold of the national state on historians’ imagination. By the middle decades of the twentieth century, institutions like the United Nations and International Labor Organization served as brokers, distributing social policy expertise around the globe, and Cold War rivals vied to imprint their own developmental models onto postcolonial nations. When compared to the predictable currents of Rodgers’s Atlantic, the motion can seem dizzying.

In the realm of social politics, however, the North Atlantic retains its utility as a focus for the study of transnational borrowing and exchange. As Rodgers notes, contrast with Europe helped to define the post-independence identity of the United States, but as industrialization undermined Jeffersonian dreams of an Arcadian yeoman’s republic, citizens became increasingly aware that their own path to social, economic, and urban modernity bore similarities to the trails being followed in Britain, Prussia, France, and other European nations. Moreover cultural linkages, abetted by rapid and regular travel, brought the national states of the North Atlantic into closer communion. Whether through the Common Law inheritance, the classical curriculum of college education, elite rituals like the grand tour, or the racial politics of what Reginald Horsman has called “Anglo-Saxonism,” many nineteenth-century Americans identified with the Old World even if they saw themselves improving on its political organization. A century later, Cold War warriors picked up on these longstanding affinities by pitting a freedom-loving West against a despotic East. Relations between the United States and Europe changed markedly between American independence and the late twentieth century, but without wishing to overstate the continuities, citizens and subjects on either side of the ocean shared enough “common referents” before and after Rodgers’s “Progressive Age” to warrant an Atlantic focus.

An element of risk intrudes upon the decision made here to maintain the geographical boundaries of Rodgers’s Atlantic while
expanding the chronological and programmatic parameters of transatlantic reform. Rodgers’s key concept—social politics—has about it a pleasing specificity, which does much to give Atlantic Crossings its intellectual drive and coherence. Indeed a merit of his approach is that it treats exceptionalism not simply as a historiographical assumption but also as a historical mindset: a set of beliefs about American difference that changed with the ebb and flow of domestic and international events. He argues that the period 1870–1940 was “different” because in these years, for a peculiar set of reasons, Americans were able and ready to look to, and to learn from, Europe. The emergence of the “social” as a distinct realm of knowledge—a development fostered by US adaptations of British social science associations and German seminar teaching in the decades after the Civil War—provided an intellectual foundation for the study of complex, interdependent phenomena like the modern city. Experts in the new science of society found institutional homes in university faculties and government departments as reform became a professional vocation. Meanwhile, the steamship—that great emblem of late-nineteenth-century globalization—ferried social policy “tourists” back and forth across the ocean. But above all, Rodgers explains, in the decades after 1870, Americans arrived at the realization that the problems of Europe were their problems too. On both sides of the Atlantic capitalist development and the tensions and contradictions it engendered forced reformers to rethink the relationship between state and society, to generate and to trade in new ideas, and, in the broadest terms, to remake the Atlantic so that it became a space of connection in which likeminded brokers of reform operated. Advocates of progressive politics in the Atlantic “moment” came from different backgrounds and embraced eclectic ideas, but as an epistemic community, they were bound together by their interest in answering the questions posed by rapid urban and industrial growth.

Recognition of interdependence, then, was crucial to the emergence of social science, but the main precondition for transnational exchange was the convergence of social experience. Americans ventured abroad, saw fixes for the problems they observed in their own society, and came home eager to apply them. The movement of social policy in this era therefore ran westwards from the Old World to the New, and carried the seeds of modern American liberalism. Routine aspects of contemporary US government—zoning and social security for instance—were borne along on this oceanic current.

Yet according to Rodgers, Americans’ “peculiarly open” disposition to foreign ideas, did not last. Having “marched to a more internalist
drummer” before the 1870s they retreated in the 1940s to “full volume” exceptionalism. Scarred by its encounters with Fascism and Communism, and increasingly pre-occupied by its Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union, Europe—in the US imagination at least—became not a storehouse of ideas but a battlefield to be secured. The Cold War’s stultifying atmosphere encouraged many ardent liberals to see postwar European welfare states as dangerously un-American: the direction of exchange now reversed as Americans looked to remake the world in their image. Social politics, Rodgers suggested, had little role in this process of reconstruction.

Rodgers, of course, made this argument for America’s transatlantic social-political moment at a specific historical juncture. At the close of the twentieth century, his recovery of “a phase of American history and politics we have all but lost” armed US progressives with a usable past to deploy in their battle to defend what remained of the New Deal order. Atlantic Crossings appeared four years after the Republican Revolution of 1994 and two years after Bill Clinton signed into a law a welfare reform bill that dismantled part of the 1935 Social Security Act. In this era of liberal accommodation and retreat, embattled defenders of the New Deal order mournfully asked themselves “why Americans hate welfare,” effectively reinforcing the conservative line that social democratic politics had never taken root in the United States. Others, while lauding European examples, tried to tie the pursuit of social justice to the responsibilities of citizenship. In contrast, Rodgers showed that in the heyday of American capitalism, foreign models held wide appeal. He did not say so directly in 1998, but the implication was clear: with the Cold War a receding memory and globalization providing a new world of “common referents,” the United States might begin again to learn lessons from overseas. He could not have known, of course, that just three years later the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 would significantly alter the posture of the United States towards the rest of the world once again, bringing the era of relative openness and opportunity in which Atlantic Crossings was written to a close.

Since the publication of Atlantic Crossings, the historiographical as well as the historical climate has changed. New work on the nineteenth century is perhaps particularly significant in this respect, not least for the ways in which it begs further questions about Rodgers’s periodization of transatlantic reform. It is reasonable to argue that a distinct phase in the history of Atlantic exchange drew to a close sometime around 1800 with the curtailing of the slave trade, the success of independence movements, and a turn to economic nationalism.
Thereafter, from the perspective of many Americans, Europe was a beacon of warning. Anglophobia lingered in the political culture of the new nation, and as Rachel Hope Cleves’s work on anti-Jacobinism in the Early Republic has demonstrated, Federalism and abolitionism were infused by fears of revolutionary violence. Yet if Americans tried to steer their ship of state away from revolutionary rocks, the upheavals in France were, for them, “an event of profound local significance.” Recent studies of nineteenth-century America show how the earthquakes that shook the Old World reverberated in the New. The aftershocks of the 1848 Revolutions, Italian Risorgimento, German Unification, and Paris Commune were each felt in American society. Often, such moments strengthened exceptionalist conviction, as when Americans celebrated republican hero Louis Kossuth as if he were a new Washington, or when they determined that the French were unfit for self-government. This new scholarship highlights the doubts nineteenth-century Americans harbored about the nation’s immunity from world-historical forces, and their anxieties about the compatibility of capitalism, democracy, and slavery.

Americans did not, then, respond passively to European affairs before 1870. Rather, they debated the relevance of developments overseas to their own society and, in many cases, joined the work of transatlantic reform. These early brokers of reform may have shared concerns about their nation’s future course, but in other respects they defied easy categorization. They included in their number conservatives who praised the infusion of “life, vigor and patriotism into the stagnation of monarchy,” utopian socialists who embraced Charles Fourier’s designs for communal living, and abolitionists who took British emancipation as their model. It is notable that all of the aforementioned groups rejected exceptionalism. In the pages of Horace Greeley’s influential New York Tribune, readers encountered the ideas of the paper’s European correspondent, Karl Marx. Before the “Progressive Age” heterodox, schemes for social reconstruction—often forged in Europe but adapted for an American setting—vied for attention, influence, and popularity.

These debates usually took place in a language that would have sounded archaic to the experts of the Progressive era. The first chapter in this volume cover a period prior to the professionalization of social science in which “socioconstitutional” analysis trumped the “socioeconomic.” Phenomena that half a century later Americans would explain in sociological terms were blamed in the mid-nineteenth century on maladies afflicting the body politic. But the gulf between what Philip J. Ethington has termed the “political conception of
society” and a “social conception of politics” was not unbridgeable, and in the last few years, historians have turned to terms like “social democracy” to describe the varieties of American politics of the era. Although lacking institutional perches in government and education, cosmopolitan reformers before the Civil War did ponder a science of society, proving more willing than is sometimes recognized to look for inspiration beyond the borders of the United States.

New work on the US state and government raises further doubts about Rodgers’s framing of the Atlantic moment. Atlantic Crossings largely accepts the Progressives’ characterization of the American state as a laggard, arguing that the revolutionary generation proved so successful in guarding against aggregations of power that its descendants were left ill equipped to deal with the challenges posed by capitalist expansion. At the turn of the century, he suggests, citizens found themselves forced all of a sudden to begin the work of reconciling themselves to the need for big government. But in light of recent scholarship, the idea of a sharp distinction between a weak nineteenth-century state of “courts and parties” and a strong, efficient twentieth-century state built by Progressives and New Dealers is harder to defend. The origins of Progressive Era statecraft, for example, long predate the Civil War. Similarly, aspects of Early Republican governance continue to shape American politics. That is not to minimize the shift that occurred around 1900 as private interests retreated before public needs; nor is it to deny the shift in the opposite direction that has been such a powerful feature of US history since the 1970s. But scholars have shown that at moments when American government was far from being a model of the rational, bureaucratic state, it nevertheless built infrastructure, waged war, and engaged in projects of large-scale social reconstruction.

Rodgers is surely right that the “core political project” of the decades before the Civil War lay in the “formation of a democratic nation.” But if the gulf separating monarchies and republics meant Europe often served as the despotic antithesis to New World liberty, Americans were not always closed to the merits of foreign policies that might strengthen their own political order. The first two chapters in this volume explore two facets of nation-building in which Americans sometimes feared Europeans had stolen a march: educational and urban planning. As David Komline shows in the essay that begins this collection, there were dense and consequential transatlantic networks in educational reform over the first decades of the nineteenth century. In the Early Republic, educational reform networks changed in character, shifting from an initial concern with the
adoption of particular pedagogical approaches to a later preoccupation with educational models and systems. Throughout, however, the United States remained relatively open to European influence. “[E]ven before the Savannah made the first transatlantic steam-powered voyage in 1819,” he writes, ideas about education flowed more or less freely across the ocean. Alert to the wider ramifications of this argument, Komline suggests that Atlantic Crossings does not succeed as an attack on American exceptionalism because it merely replaces one form of exceptionalism—Sonderweg—with another—Sonderzeit. Andrew Heath’s essay, which completes the first part of the volume, builds on Komline’s argument. It shows that ideas about urban governance borrowed and adapted from the politics of the French Second Republic and Second Empire influenced debates over the course of the Civil War-era American city. By the 1860s, US cities were being re-imagined as sites of intertwined spatial and social reconstruction. Focusing primarily on Philadelphia, Heath illuminates how, before the 1870s, the French Second Empire contributed to a new vision of the city as a social policy arena.

The essays in Part II overlap chronologically with Atlantic Crossings while highlighting varieties of transatlantic reform Rodgers neglects. These chapters build on work undertaken since 1998, which has shown the varied character of Atlantic politics in the Progressive era. The protean nature of Progressivism meant the drift of social policy did not only lead in the direction of modern liberalism. Apartheid, for example, had a transnational history in a period that “witnessed a planet-wide proliferation of residentially-segregated cities.”31 Brokers of exchange, meanwhile, were diverse, encompassing segments of American society renowned—in some cases unjustly—more for parochialism than for cosmopolitanism. In his chapter on Boston publisher Benjamin O. Flower, Jean-Louis Marin-Lamellet shows that like other participants in the world of transatlantic social politics, US Populists could be outward-looking, deeply interested in learning from European models and experiments, and as keen to be involved in the formation of social policy as were other so-called progressives. It is true that there were limits to Flower’s cosmopolitanism—in the pages of Flower’s magazine, The Arena, it was assumed that European policies would need to be “Americanized” if they were to succeed on US soil—but it is equally clear that historians need to rethink the place of Populism in their accounts of transatlantic politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Further developing this point, Daniel Scroop’s essay on the travels of two leading populist-progressives of the early twentieth century—William Jennings Bryan
and Robert M. La Follette, Jr—argues that the stubbornly persistent idea of populism as a fundamentally parochial and inward-looking political tradition has blinded historians to its significance as a constituent element of transatlantic politics. Both Bryan and La Follette, he shows, were embedded in transnational and (in Bryan’s case) global networks of reform.

Axel Schäfer’s innovative study of the career of Isaac Rubinow brings Part II to a close by highlighting another neglected strand in the intricate latticework of transatlantic reform. His examination of the interface between social policy and migration shows that Rubinow—a man sometimes referred to as the “father of Social Security”—drew on German mutualism in an attempt to create a fresh model of social welfare for the modern age. Seeking a bold, pluralistic approach to social citizenship, Rubinow’s powerful redistributive ideas ran aground, Schäfer argues, as a result of the increased bureaucracy and repression that accompanied the First World War. His efforts were further impeded by changing perceptions of Germany as it shifted from being a widely admired source of policy innovation and civilized values to being cast as an essentially barbaric nation. In the age of the Red Scare, there was no place for Rubinow’s tolerant pluralism. Schäfer’s essay provides a valuable account of an important episode in US social policy while also showing how the historiographies of transatlantic reform and immigration can be connected.

The four essays in Part III of the volume test both the periodization and the programmatic bias of Rodgers’s work on transatlantic reform. Jonathan Bell’s study challenges the established assumption that US and European liberalism diverged in the aftermath of the Second World War. Deploying evidence drawn from case studies of Australia and New Zealand as well as from Europe, he shows that mid-twentieth-century US liberalism actively sought solutions abroad. Despite the constraints imposed by business antistatism and emboldened anticommunism, the war “widened the parameters of American liberalism,” he argues. American liberals and progressives were fascinated, for example, by the reforms of the Attlee government in the United Kingdom but ultimately lacked the ideological resources to exploit the opportunities that arose, notably in the case of the fight for health care reform, in which they were outgunned by their well-organized conservative opponents.

The final three essays of the collection demonstrate that in the post-1945 era transatlantic politics was animated by vibrant right-wing as well as left-wing interactions. Where Parts I and II followed Rodgers in tracing the movement of ideas from east to
west, Part III explores how American policy and ideas influenced European debate as the United States exerted its global might. First, Manuel Tardio highlights how the international debate sparked by the publication in 1960 of US sociologist Daniel Bell’s classic *The End of Ideology* influenced the thought of two leading technocrats who operated close to the heart of the Franco regime: Laureano López Rodó and Gonzalo Fernández de la Mora. The Bell thesis helped these key figures to elaborate a politics, which legitimized the authoritarian Franco regime in a way that advanced their position as expert administrators and proponents of free market economics. Tardio deftly explains both the peculiarly Spanish context and the wider transnational setting of a moment in which US sociology and Spanish technocracy joined in an unlikely instance of transoceanic intellectual dialogue. The essay that follows, written by David Sarias, picks up on and further develops the theme of US-Spanish ideological exchange. It sketches the emergence and subsequent trajectory of an epistemic community of traditionalist US conservatives whose politics was powerfully influenced by their exposure to European debates in general and to Spanish connections in particular. Political and cultural development in the 1950s and 1960s, he argues, fostered cooperation between US and Spanish conservatives, including those on the far Right of the political spectrum. But as Nick Witham’s contribution—the final essay in the collection—shows, it was not only on the programmatic Right that fresh connections were being made in the middle and late twentieth century. Focusing on two publishing initiatives started by Verso Books in 1985—*The Year Left* and *The Haymarket Series*—Witham shows how publishing was an important zone of engagement for the transatlantic Left. Combining elements of cultural and intellectual history, his essay suggests that the declension narratives typically associated with the trajectory of Left politics in the 1980s require some adjustment. It also reminds us that print culture was a powerful agent of transnational interconnection in the late modern Atlantic world, just as it was in the early modern period. The radical internationalists of Witham’s study differed in many ways from their forebears, but he shows that long after the classic age of transatlantic political exchange, the Atlantic remained an important nexus of interaction between the European and US Lefts.

**Notes**


3. *Atlantic Crossings* won a number of prestigious prizes, among them the George Louis Beer Prize of the American Historical Association and the Ellis W. Hawley Prize of the Organization of American Historians. It was published in German translation in 2010 and in Chinese in 2011.


5. It should be noted that historians of reform whose research touched on, or engaged with, work in the history of migration, immigration, diasporas, or race relations, were not affected in the same way because these fields were already substantially transnational in their assumptions and core methodologies long before *Atlantic Crossings* appeared.


9. For journals, see for instance *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* (established 1999); *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* (established 2004); and the *Journal of Transnational American Studies* (established 2008). History departments in Europe and the United States now often advertise jobs in transnational history. By 2010, 52.3% of departments in the United States counted at least one world historian among their faculty, an increase of over 30% from 2000. See Lisa A. Lindsay, “The Appeal of Transnational History,” *Perspectives on History* 50, no. 9 (Dec. 2012), 48–49.


32. On right-wing exchange in the era, see Richard Cockett, Thinking the Unthinkable: Think-Tanks and the Economic Counter-Revolution, 1931–1983 (London: HarperCollins, 1994); Martin Durham and Margaret Power (eds), New Perspectives on the Transnational Right (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2010); Daniel Stedman Jones, Masters
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