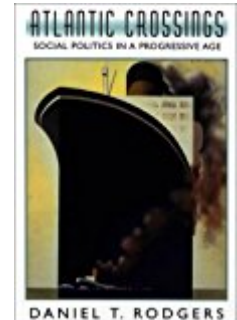


Daniel T. Rodgers. *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age.*
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Reviewed by Sonya Michel

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NOTE: H-STATE (Peter Dobkin Hall), H-URBAN (Clay McShane) and H-SCI-MED-TECH (Harry M. Marks) have organized a review symposium of Daniel T. Rodgers' *Atlantic Crossings*. Rodgers' book offers a substantial reinterpretation of Euro-American social reform in the decades 1880-1940; it discusses topics of interest to a great many kinds of historians, including urban history, public health, labor and political history among others.

The symposium leads with a summary of the book by Harry M. Marks (The Johns Hopkins University), to be followed by comments (in separate messages) from Prof. Victoria de Grazia (Columbia University), David Hammack (Case Western Reserve University), Seth Koven (Villanova University), Sonya Michel (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), and Pierre-Yves Saunier (CNRS, Lyon). The author's own comments can be found linked to each individual review.

Anyone who is interested in accessing the colloquium, in whole or in part, can do so in the Book Review Logs under the headings of H-Sci-Med-Tech, H-State, and H-Urban. All of the indi-

vidual posts will be placed under each list's header.

Partly in response to the challenges of comparative historical sociologists, partly to promptings from within their own discipline and field, historians of the U.S. have recently begun to adopt a more internationalist and comparative approach. With the publication of *Atlantic Crossings*, Daniel Rodgers sets a new standard for this sort of work. Capacious (to use Natalie Zemon Davis' well-chosen word) yet fine-grained, this study places the history of American social policy in a new light, offering insights and provocations that others will be grappling with for years to come.

In comparing and contrasting turn-of-the-nineteenth-century developments in Europe and the U.S., Rodgers, unlike many current practitioners of comparative history, refuses to construct a neat typology or rely on an existing one to do the work of explanation. His restraint is all the more admirable because the period and set of circumstances under study form an ideal social scientific "case," that is, one in which there is a constant or

set of constants (namely, the ideas and concepts of social politics being trafficked between Europe and America, usually, during this early period, from east to west), and a range of dependent variables--the reception of those ideas and concepts on foreign (usually American) soil.

This is not to say that Rodgers eschews systematic analysis; far from it. But instead of adducing the outcomes a typology would predict, he provides, in each instance (and sometimes multiply, when the imports land in different sites), nuanced explanations of why a particular idea "took" or, more often, failed to do so. Among the factors that matter are "interests and ideology,...timing, inertia, precedent and preemption,...and the social configuration of capital" (p. 200). Through deft use of telling details and mots justes, Rodgers' parses subtle differences among societies and cultures. Throughout, the freshness of his style, even when discussing the most abstract matters, restores one's faith in the infinite resources of the English language.

As Rodgers' early chapters document, the export trade in progressive European social politics was robust, with most of the impetus coming not from Europeans eager to impose their ideas on the U.S. but from Americans seeking new approaches to perceived problems at home. Comparing their politics to those of Europe, these progressives came to understand that although the U.S. could boast a higher level of democracy in terms of suffrage and property rights, it offered far less by way of material goods and services; they recognized, in other words, a discrepancy between "the democracy of form and the democracy of act" (p. 158) (between political and social citizenship, to use T.H. Marshall's terms), and this was what they sought to correct.

Despite apparent similarities between European and American social and economic conditions and the enthusiasm of the travelers for European innovations, few of the transplants took root, at least, not immediately. Rodgers, however,

resists the conclusion that this long history of failed transplants reveals a pattern of American exceptionalism. Exceptionalism rests in part on isolation, and for Rodgers, the very fact that the U.S. was for decades deeply enmeshed in many layers of Atlantic crossings meant that it was by no means isolated. But was participation in an ongoing intellectual exchange, energetic and proactive though it was, sufficient immunization against exceptionalism? Or, rather, do America's responses to proposed transplantations, however complex, indicate that a particular pattern of social politics was emerging, a pattern that was not evolutionary (as a stark typology might imply), but was instead formed by the very accretions of those responses, admixed with domestic developments (what sociologists Ann Orloff, Theda Skocpol, and Margaret Weir would call "policy feedback")?

A focus on the gendered and racialized dimensions of U.S. social politics would suggest the latter. But neither race nor gender figure significantly in Rodgers' analytical scheme. Though only a handful of middle-class white women (most prominently Jane Addams and Florence Kelley) and minority men (W.E.B. Du Bois) make their appearances in the early chapters, Rodgers does not use race as a political factor until the New Deal, and he minimizes the distinctiveness of maternalist politics. To be fair, he does refer to the ethnic heterogeneity that made it more difficult for Americans to accept universalistic principles honed in homogeneous European societies, but mentions only in passing the deep racial cleavages of Jim Crow America that underlay ethnic conflict. As Joanne Goodwin, among others, has demonstrated, racism as well as nativism skewed the administration of early social policies like mothers' pensions and left them permanently stigmatized [1].

Rodgers scants the structural conditions that allowed primarily white male elites to become travelers in the first place, and at the same time

he overlooks those that facilitated women's activism at home. While pointing, quite rightly, to the importance of urban venues for early social politics, he does not mention that cities also allowed women to enter the political field more conveniently and gracefully. His interest in world-traveling women tends to marginalize those who labored anonymously in the urban trenches. Though the influence of figures like Kelley and Addams cannot be denied, it remains the case that much of the momentum for early social legislation came from the rank and file of organizations like the National Congress of Mothers and the General Federation of Women's Clubs--women whose maternalist vision, far less cosmopolitan than that of the world travelers, imbued provisions like mothers' pensions with a tone of middle-class condescension and reinforced a male breadwinner ideal.

Indeed, though progressive reformer William Hard relied on the universalistic principles enunciated by British New Liberal L.T. Hobhouse in advocating for pension laws, it was a combination of sentimental maternalist appeals to motherhood and hardheaded thrift that ultimately carried the day with state legislators. Such provisions established a paradigm for the social-political inscription of women that was reproduced in the Social Security Act and its amendments and persisted at least until the welfare "reform" of 1996. This paradigm, I would argue, constituted a distinctive and continuous element of American social politics which, while perhaps not unique or "exceptional," repeatedly served to deflect models from abroad for more progressive policies toward women such as child care and paid maternity leave.

Perhaps less germane to Rodgers' agenda but more disconcerting to historians of women and gender is his reversion to a definition of the welfare state that privileges policies targeted toward wage-earning men such as unemployment insurance and workmen's compensation as "social insurance," while treating provisions that primarily

benefit women and children, such as mothers' pensions, as secondary or subsidiary. Feminist analysts have repeatedly exposed this definition as inherently male-biased and criticized it for reproducing precisely that which must be deconstructed, namely the very formation of a "male-breadwinner state." Rodgers' predilection here is all the more unfortunate since he cites but does not adopt Barbara Nelson's notion of a "two-channel welfare state" (p. 561, n. 63), a model that more accurately captures not only the genealogy but also the dynamics and impact of the U.S. welfare system from the Progressive Era onward.

Perhaps the reason Rodgers gives programs such as mothers' pensions and child welfare such short shrift is that they seem to lack the internationalist dimension that is, after all, his main concern. But these programs were in fact the subject of international discussions, and imported ideas played a role (albeit often a limited one) in U.S. debates. Writing in 1913, the progressive William Hard, mentioned above, sought to transform the discourse surrounding mothers' pensions by interjecting New Liberal principles, but he largely failed to convince his fellow Americans that the measure should be considered "payment for a civic service" rather than a "dole." A few years later, New York City reformer Katharine Anthony, influenced by the radical feminist visions of Swedish writer Ellen Key and British reformer Eleanor Rathbone, called for an honorific "endowment of motherhood" rather than stigmatizing pensions. Rodgers compares American formulations unfavorably with those in France, where pronatalism gave policies toward mothers "a civic and political spin" (p. 241), and he mentions that American mothers' pensions provided British feminists with a precedent, but he misses the influences that flowed in the opposite direction. Though such omissions are rare for Rodgers, in this instance, they leave a telling gap.

Indeed, the eventual bottoming of the U.S. mothers' pension debate on sentiment and "wom-

en's weakness," as Rodgers puts it, is instructive, for it demonstrates how the radical gender implications of certain imports could become blunted within a political culture that lacked the universalizing potential of an indigenous socialism or liberalism (I say "potential" because I am well aware that neither France nor Britain, where these political strains were markedly stronger, produced model policies toward women during this period, though in both, social provisions for mothers, if not civil rights for all women, tended to be more generous than in the U.S.). If, as Kathryn Kish Sklar (whose fine biography of Florence Kelley Rodgers curiously neglects) argues, "gender did the work of class" in forging U.S. social policy, then Rodgers would have profited from engaging more deeply with women and gender politics in explaining the mixed outcomes of attempted European transplantations [2].

Engagement with gender politics would also have provided Rodgers with another avenue into the comparative impact of socialism on social politics, a theme he pursues, but (probably in an attempt to avoid rehearsing the old exceptionalist arguments) not as assiduously as he might have. He might, for instance, examined the extended worldwide debate over protective legislation for women, a debate that over the years gave rise to numerous international conferences and occupied speakers at many international socialist conferences as well. Like social politics in general, protective legislation provides another "ideal case" for comparativists, for common ideas form a constant whose application varied widely from one setting to another. Moreover, as the comprehensive collection edited by Ulla Wikander, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Jane Lewis (cited by Rodgers only in the context of "social maternalism" in general) demonstrates, shifts in the positions of key socialist women leaders rippled across the debate from Europe and North America to the Antipodes, revealing much about women's prospects within

the socialist movement--and socialism's prospects within different national settings [3].

For women activists in the U.S., where protective legislation made considerable headway, international debates and information on developments in all areas of social politics concerning women and children were extremely valuable, both as sources of ideas for alternative policy formulations and as ammunition in legislative campaigns. The U.S. Children's Bureau and later the Women's Bureau frequently compiled worldwide data on mothers' pensions, infant and maternal mortality, maternity leaves, and similar issues, and then, deploying rather rudimentary "shame" tactics, used their reports as leverage in Congress. One wishes that Rodgers had compared some of these campaigns to those involving benefits and services for men, many of which he does examine in depth [4].

Does Rodgers' relative inattention to race and gender undermine his fundamental arguments, or am I simply carping, falling into the usual reviewer's stance of wishing that the author had written a different book? I am glad--very glad, indeed--that Rodgers has written *Atlantic Crossings*, but I wish he had grappled with these issues more fully, not only for the pleasure of seeing his discerning mind at work on them, but because their absence inevitably shapes his interpretation. While his claims about the continuities between the Progressive Era and the 1930s are convincing, his marginalization of the "women's welfare state" and delayed attention to race leads him to overemphasize the European roots of certain New Deal ideas while neglecting the racialized, gendered paradigm that the indigenous politics of the earlier period also cast over this remarkable body of legislation. His privileging of transatlantic over indigenous factors also causes him to overstate the discontinuities between the New Deal and postwar social politics.

Finally, while Rodgers is no doubt right that World War II and the Cold War sent the transat-

lantic exchange into eclipse, I would argue that it did not disappear entirely. Though not terribly viable politically, it continues now in the fields of comparative historical sociology and comparative policy history--fields to which *Atlantic Crossings* is a major contribution. With its wealth of documentation, methodological innovations, and historiographical challenges, this fine book will not only add new rigor and richness to the field, but it bids fair to inaugurate a new chapter in the ongoing history of the transatlantic exchange.

Notes

[1]. Joanne L. Goodwin, *Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform: Mothers' Pensions in Chicago, 1911-1929* (University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[2]. Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work* (Yale University Press, 1995).

[3]. Alice Kessler-Harris, Jane Lewis and Ulla Wikander, *Protecting Women. Labor Legislation in Europe, the United States, and Australia, 1880-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

[4]. See Kriste Lindenmeyer, *A Right to Childhood. The U.S. Children's Bureau and Child Welfare, 1912-1946* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

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