H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Daniel T. Rodgers. *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. 672 pp. $35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-05131-7.

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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-Champagne), 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 individual posts will be placed under each list's header.

When I read about the publication of Daniel T. Rodgers' *Atlantic Crossings* in the Harvard University Press 1998 catalogue, my anxiety was double. First, I could not wait to read the book, as my own research deals with how people, schemes, ideas, words, books, designs traveled across the oceans in the first half of our century, with a special attention to "urban issues". The book was obviously a very much needed friendly companion for this research. Second, I was anxious to discover if Daniel Rodgers had written the book I wanted to write. As a reviewer, I am still sitting on this rusted fence: I want to give an "insider's" angle on the book, but I must review the book he wrote and not the book I would like to write. These anxieties probably shape all that I can write in this electronic symposium. I hope they will not prevent me from bringing an interesting and fair perspective to a work that will stay on my working table for a long time. But I am also sure that this will give a kind of unruly aspect to this text, as the questions that came to my mind when reading the

book were also questions regarding my research: this means that they are not "compliments" nor "reproaches" to *Atlantic Crossings*, but rather an open dialogue with the book.

The book jacket bears an Art Deco style picture of a transatlantic steamship. This reproduction of one of the famous posters by the French designer Cassandre on the cover of the book is appealing at first sight. The impressive steamer brings us back to the time of pendular travel [1], to the life between two worlds that Fitzgerald or Hemingway had made dear to us during hot summer afternoon teenage readings. Of course, Rodgers does not pay attention to these kinds of contact and exchanges, but it must be kept in mind that his Atlantic crossings (in social politics) got along with many other crossings of ideas, people, books, songs, paintings, values and products. The North Atlantic economy [2] nourished all those cultural exchanges in an era when social politics also boarded the liners departing or arriving under the vacant eyes of Lady Liberty. Indeed, the focal point of Rodgers' book is the United States of America.

His introduction makes it clear that the book is intended to counter an "all-american" view of american history. The whole book argues convincingly against the (seemingly) common opinion of the "exceptional" nature of the United States of America. But the path that Rodgers takes in order to cope with the exceptionalism thesis makes his book an intriguing read for many people other than historians of the USA. It is a fascinating and instructive reading for all those who care about the international circulation of ideas. In our own researches, we mention too often the existence of a "foreign model"--German, Spanish of Chinese according to circumstances--to explain a new set of governmental measures, a new artistic trend, a new way of writing novels or a new social movement in the country we study. Like a deus ex machina, the "foreign model" comes unmediated, miraculously unwrapped--as neat as when it left his point of departure. But ideas, values, skills, words or visions of the world are not manufactured products coming in and out of containers. Daniel Rodgers urges us to wrestle with a whole set of arguments to deal with this international commerce.

He shows us how to consider the indigenous circumstances which shape each model's creation and its legitimation abroad as something worth importation. Here, his insistence on the subtleties of the rhetoric of backwardness is especially valuable); he points to the necessity to pay attention to the shipping crate in which ideas travelled, the circumstances of the journey, the points of arrival and departure; above all, he reminds us that no Atlantic crossing left the ideas unchanged, and that importation (of words, ideas, policies, laws) means translation and reappropriation. His careful analysis of what happened to several social policies of "foreign" origin also underlines how the context of the importing country matters in understanding what comes out of the importation process. But Rodgers's book is also a rewarding read for many "non-international" historians, because of -at least- two other reasons.

First, his pleas against geocentrisms and the analytical iron cage of national histories. As he writes, historical scholarship is partly right in treating the distinctiveness of each nation's peculiar history. But, doing this, it lops off the connections and similarities among countries. What Rodgers proposes to get over this obstacle is not comparative history as usually understood. The aim is, as in comparative history, to put several nations on the scene. But instead of pointing at differences, as comparative history usually does by going from one country to another, Rodgers choses to point to similarities, taking the "world between" the nations, the connections, as his field. The proposal is exciting, as it sounds like a promise to bust out the straightjacket of "national" histories in a much more efficient way than comparative history does. With comparative history, na-

tions are still the touchstones of historical analysis, and its frame. "Starting with connections", as Rodgers choses to do, surely brings something to be gained. It may "shift the frames and boundaries of classic American history" (p.7), but it also does something to classic national histories elsewhere. In my mind, Daniel Rodgers has clearly drawn an approach that is complementary to comparative history for all those who don't want to be "one place" historians. This move is familiar to medieval or early modern historians, who did not stop the searchlight at the national boarders when they were studying religion or culture. But the impressive growth of nation-states in the 19th and 20th centuries has often prevented modern historians from acting similarly. Rodgers' Atlantic might inspire them as Braudel's Mediterrannee once did for their fellows.

The second universal point of interest of Rodger's book lies in him tackling the history of social politics at large and from an international angle. This seems to be the right way to think about what "reform" or "being a progressive" meant in the "North Atlantic world" -whatever that is- between 1870 and 1940, when those words permeated the whole world in a thicker and thicker web of exchanges embodied in travels, congresses, exhibitions, books, periodicals. Indeed, his book, together with other works [3] suggests that reform is, above all, an international phenomena. Its values, its shared attitudes and references, its questions and suggestions took form and definition at the international scale. Like an echo of Enlightment cosmopolitanism, the progressives, though they clearly had to deal with the nation-states they belonged to, built their attempts to change the world on their connections beyond national borders.

As Harry Marks has produced an overview of the book, I won't linger on description. Neither will I, as I had first expected, focus on the "urban" chapters of the book, "The self-owned city" and "Civic ambitions" (though chapter 9 "The machine age" is also of particular urban relevance). In fact, I don't think that the quality of Rodger's work lies in the specifics, though each thematic and/or chronological chapter brings his share of detailed knowledge to readers who are not as familiar as Rodgers is with information coming from different countries (4). International specialists on workers' insurance or rural cooperative movements might not learn a great deal from the chapters dealing with their favorite subjects, and might even have a clear idea about the missing parts in Rodgers' picture. They would argue on this point, suggest that point, mention some forgotten bibliographical references. But they must resist this temptation given by the power of reviewing, as they would betray the book by doing so. The strength of the book precisely lies in the fact that it can take those specialists out of their fields to reintroduce them to the wide array of themes embraced by turn of the century reformers. Indeed, chapter 3 reminds us of something each of us tend to forget when we dive into our specifics: like their German masters and many of their European counterparts, Simon Patten, Richard Ely or Edmund James were committed to many aspects of reform, from social insurance to municipal government, from the development of social sciences to popular education, from the extension of democracy to the improvement of working conditions. "Being a reformer" or "being a progressive" meant being involved in many "issues" at the same time, all those issues contributing to the same aim at an international level: peacefully mending the society that had been shaped by the rise of industry, capitalism, urbanism and democracy, in order to find a way between the market Diktat and Revolution. It is up to us to heed this call: scholars of "reform", wherever they are, have to respect this national and thematic ubiquity of reform and reformers. Of course, we must pay attention to the shifts towards specialization and professionalization that developed concomitantly at the national levels, but without being blinded by their light.

So, I will forget the "urban" sides, and some trivial comments that would not be a match for Daniel Rodgers' work. Neither will I stress the many questions that Rodgers open for the scholars of comparative social policies, especially his considerations about timing, context and the conditions for success. Rather,I want to concentrate on two points that came again and again while I was reading the book as a "participating reader" who had to face some of the same questions and choices that Rodgers faced. The first is about a choice he made to privilege printed material and interindividual connections rather than the structures that framed these contacts. It is a choice that has produced tremendously interesting results, but that also leaves us with many opportunities. The second is about the geographical focus of Rodgers' study and carries questions about the difficulties in doing the kind of "world history" that he has attempted. Indeed, the world is vast and we cannot embrace it all -unless we have this faith and energy to go for teamwork. So the question is which slice of it do we choose to study.

1. Working on connections: who has lost the user's guide?

There certainly is no genuine or unique way to work on connections. According to the place where you work and live, to the library facilities you have, to the languages you read and to your specialty, there are things that will prove possible and others not. We are not all polyglots or successful grant-applicants. Nevertheless, considering the prominent resources of Daniel Rodgers, it seems to me that he has made two major choices in the vast possibilities that were opened to him.

The first choice was to focus on the role of individuals in the Atlantic connection. This choice produced detailed and fascinating accounts of the energy , skill and faith of the progressives. By focussing on such rich persons as Richard Ely, Albert Shaw, Frederic Howe, Florence Kelley, Charles McCarthy, Elwood Mead, Edith Elmer-Wood or Catherine Bauer, Rodgers gives us a thick description of how the US international idea brokers discovered Europe, interpreted it and tried to bring back the best of its social achievements. As the result is so rewarding, the point is not to put Rodgers on trial for this choice. A question nonetheless remains about the existence of more obscure importers than the ones who inhabit his book and who are familiar to most of reform scholars [5]. More importantly, Rodgers deliberately left aside a closer examination of all the structures that organized the "world in between". Ideas and models often cross the pages of ***Atlantic crossings***, but we certainly need to know more about the specific rules, constraints and thw work of congresses and exhibitions [7], of the structured connections laid by the socialists, the catholics or the protestants, of the quests organized by federal structures (such as the Bureau of Labor) or by reformers and business societies (such as the National Civic Federation or the Chambers of Commerce), of the action of organizations such as the Institute of Educational travel. As Rodgers points out, the "market of connections" became more and more organized in the 1930s, but even before it seems to me that the connection choices an individual could make, and the things that he could carried home with him, were not free of all organizational constraints/concerns. Among these constraints were 'Societies' that specialized in the international trade of social policies, and managed the definition of what it was possible to import. For example, the ***Survey***, the NY periodical managed by Paul Kellog, led a conscious campaign to give Americans their "marching orders from the older civilization to the new" (Kellog, quoted p.267). Such devotion over the years could not but have consequences on with what, who and where the connections were developed. There were many agencies with this kind of organized will to develop connections. The foundations were amongst them, a world of their own with their staff and programs. [8]. Rodgers mentions the Oeberlander Trust (that specialized in Germany), the American-Scandina-

vian Fund, and also "golden donors" such as the Russell-Sage, the Carnegie and the Rockefeller. But they only appear when he tells the story of an individual trying to get some funding from them, as with the Irish rural activist Horace Plunkett (p. 333-335). Nowhere are they considered in light of their structures and the framing effect they might have had on US connections with Europe. Lawrence Veiller's connections with Europe in the housing field were largely funded by the Russell-Sage, as David Hammack probably reminds us in his participation to this symposium. Later, the "1313 center" organized in Chicago under the leadership of Louis Brownlow and Charles Merriam with Rockefeller monies was especially assiduous to work on the import-export of ideas in the public administration field, including municipal government and housing [9]. For sure, the main concerns of the big foundations can be said to have been child care, public health, the peace movement or the social sciences, but I suspect that their size and power shaped the way the Atlantic connection worked even outside of these specialties. As far as the Rockefeller is concerned, this seems to be especially true for the New Deal period, as the people connected with the 1313 center and the Rockefeller philanthropies were major figures of the brain trust and of the new federal agencies. It was Daniel Rodgers' right to leave the philanthropies outside of his already-rich landscape. It will be the duty of others to bring them back in the picture with the other structures that consciously organized the Atlantic connection.

One reason why Rodgers left the structures out may have to do with his second major choice, e.g. working with printed sources rather than with archives. Private papers are almost the only archival pieces he uses, and with great parsimony. I would have expected more use of journals such as John Ihlder's about the study tour he directed in 1914 for the National Housing Association, or a deeper analysis of the papers left by an Atlantic crosser such as John Nolen, in order to have a clearer understanding of the mechanisms of US tours of Europe, or of the meaning and consequences of having personal contacts with european like-minded reformers. Daniel Rodgers chose to privilege the writings (articles, books, reports) thrown in the public arena by US idea brokers, rather than the elements documenting the process of brokering, its limits and components. That is very coherent with his aims, his priority being to describe what has been brought from Europe, and how the importers tried to change matters on the other side of the Atlantic. Doing this, he also urges us to contribute to the puzzle he has begun to assemble. Nevertheless, this preference for printed material might have other consequences, as a result of the emphasis Rodgers places on Germany and Great-Britain.

2. London-Berlin- New York : the golden triangle of the Atlantic connection?

Germany and the UK are the salient points of the geography of exchanges, flows and importations drawn by the book. Though Denmark, Sweden, Italy, France, Ireland or Belgium also step on the scene here and there, the German and British elements dominate the book. For sure, this is not scandalous at all. Apart from the language question that eased the US quest in the United Kingdom, Germany and Great Britain are arguably at the forefront of the shocks created by the age of capitalism, and offered natural breeding grounds for the invention of social politics that our US progressives were in search of. Above all, as the major purpose of the book is to recover the process of importation, it is fair to give priority to the countries that were privileged by the US importers themselves. If these were Germany and the UK, why should we bother? Good. But if we, as the book deserves, consider Rodgers' work as something more than a piece of US history, as an attempt and a call to study connections, to bring more light on how ideas circulated and were changed in this circulation process, then we may try to explore the question further.

At first sight the German-British privilege can be exaggerated in two ways. As Rodgers carefully points out, the American progressives in search of solutions tended to focus on achievements instead of considering the processes and contexts that made these achievements possible. Thus, by focussing on Germany and the UK, it is also possible that the modern historian misses the former moves of a scheme or an idea, and also the contexts and processes that shaped this scheme and idea in his first travels, and thus conditioned its forthcoming trajectory.

Let's consider, for example, Chapter Six, where Rodgers mentions that the US imported British social insurance legislation passed by Lloyd Georges was itself borrowed from Denmark and Germany. These prior translations might be important even when the importation towards the USA is the main question, as previous importations might explain the fate of imported ideas once they land in America. As Rodgers writes (p. 198), "Precedents were not only exchanged; they were sifted, winnowed, extracted from context, blocked, transformed and exaggerated". Thus, catching an idea in its German or British "state of mind" means that the historian of connections can lose all this careful engineering, and mistake a point in a process as The point of origin. The other cost of emphasizing the UK and Germany might be that it leaves aside the "small countries" that were important -and forgotten- places for international activities, or important -and forgotten- sources of social innovations. Sweden, Belgium, Italy of the Netherlands are mentioned in *Atlantic Crossings*, but their examples are alluded to rather than developed. For example, Rodgers suggests that the municipal unemployment schemes of German towns were inspired by the Belgium municipalities (p.225): indeed the system created by Varlez in the town of Gand was very important amongst reformers in this area and gave impetus to the reflection on public involvement concerning unemployment [8]. Once again, perhaps the US idea brokers simply were not paying that much attention to these small countries. Then Rodgers is right not to care, as he never pretends to describe the "origins" of ideas or schemes when he describes their importation to the USA.

But chapter eight, "Rural reconstruction" offers the reader an opportunity to carry the question further. Only in this chapter does Rodgers consider such a vast sample of countries, from Germany to Italy, Denmark, France or Belgium. Once again, it might be that these countries paid the heaviest interest to rural reform, and that the US importers focused on them. But this chapter is also the one where Rodgers has found very little available research in English, and hence was forced to make the most with first hand material such as reports, diaries, etc. The cosmopolitism of this chapter is especially obvious in the part devoted to the cooperative movement, as a replica of the cosmopolitism of the international cooperative movement itself. This movement does not seem to have been dominated by a single country or a culture as was the case in other spheres (city planning, for example, was widely "controlled" by the British). The cosmopolitanism of rural reform has been noted by Rodgers, and this raises the question about the other spheres of reform he examined. I just wonder whether he might have been influenced by the strong domination or imperialism of the British and German in these spheres, overshadowing the contribution of less 'aggressive' cultures. This brings me to two remarks. Both are not strictly addressed to Rodgers' work, but they wish to build on it...

The first is about the link between two visions-- the reformers' and the historians'. If we consider that Daniel Rodgers is right to follow the focus of US Atlantic crossers on Germany and UK, we may still wonder whether he is right to record this focus as a given fact. Rodgers stresses how important the rhetoric of "backwardness" was in the discourse of the US progressive importers, as a crucial weapon to empower their claim for the building of social policies in their country. Then, it

must be considered whether this rhetoric would have been as efficient if reformers had compared the US with Belgium and Italy rather than with Germany and the UK. Would it have mattered to anyone if reformers claimed that the US was losing a race to such "junior nations", rather than to two of the world's leading powers. Hence the question: to maximize the success of the importation process, the international brokers may have cheated on the labels describing the origins of the schemes they brought from Old Europe. Rodgers does mention the 1st WW and its tomorrow as a moment where the German origins of schemes and ideas were better off hidden. There were also times when German or British origins were better to be put on display. Then, if following the steps of US brokers is a necessity, their discourse strategy might nonetheless obscure the origins of what they loan, borrow and bring home.

The second point is about the tools Rodgers has used. I often wonder what is the best working process when you want to work on connections. The question is two-fold. The first point is how you will build your bibliography. The second is how you will build your corpus of sources. As we all do, Rodgers has made choices in answering those two questions. I would like to briefly connect those choices to what has just been said. As said earlier, Rodgers has privileged printed sources over archives. Doing this, he has made the strategical discourse of the reformers his material. Certainly, all source materials are discourses, and none is free of strategical aims. Nevertheless, as Rodgers shows, the reports and books produced by the US progressives were the public weapons of their fight to build social policies. Hence the possible bias that has been suggested in the last paragraphs. On the other hand, it is clear that most of the book's bibliography is based on US research on Europe and British or German scholarship. The point in not to blame Rodgers for not being a fluent reader in Finnish, Polish, Dutch, Lithuanian or Italian. None of us is, and the solution to this is certainly teamwork at the international scale. But we know that Rodgers does read French. Then, the absence of much scholarship in French, either on Belgium or France, or on the european connections of reform, might be a new hint of the excessive privilege paid to Germany and the UK. I was just wondering whether US modern historical scholarship was not bending under the same forces as early century reform, privileging the study of Germany and the UK rather than the "small" countries of Europe. Of course, I would need to know far more things about the US academic world to go further in interpretating the case of ***Atlantic crossings***, but I will nevertheless formulate my question more generally. Don't we, all of us who work on connections, pay excessive attentions to specific connections with one country or another, the criteria of this privilege being connected to the contemporary size and importance of these countries, that generally goes along with the symbolic and scientific rewards it can bring us as an historical subject ? In other words, I gather from personal experimentation that what leads us towards the choice of studying, let's say, the French German connection in municipal government, rather than the French-Belgium connection, is as much the "strategical interest" in being a specialist of Germany in the French academic word as the intrinsic quality of this connection (6). I may be wrong in thinking that our work on connections can be biased by such material considerations. If not, then we have to keep that in mind if we aim at following the touchstones laid by Rodgers and to study the "worlds in between" nations. With a scout-master of the quality of***Atlantic Crossings***, followers must work hard to improve the record. Certainly, Thomas Bender and other report-writers should avoid such ultimate sentences as "It is probably the most important book written on the 20th century in a decade at last", "one of today's leading historians" and "a book unlike any other I have ever read". As much rooted in american academic tradition as these gimmicks are, it would be my wish for the millennium that publishers stop

using them and that report-writers stop thinking they have to carve such commonplaces. But, from the other side of the Atlantic, I can say from my own experience that ***Atlantic crossings*** can affect the research and reflection of all those who pay interest to comparative history, to the world of reformers or to social policies ... I mean, if they read it.

Notes

[1]. Henry James called Edith Wharton, another American writer who settled up in Paris in 1907, the "pendular woman".

[2]. Daniel Rodgers makes a wide use of this term, though I had difficulties in figuring out the extent of the North Atlantic: from Berlin to Bogota, from Berlin to San Francisco, eastern wards towards Moscow or down under till New Zealand and Australia, his geography is quite vague. Clearly, since Braudel and Wallenstein, we know more or less what he means, but he uses the term "North Atlantic" enough to deserve a stronger definition or explanation.

[3]. To be added to the titles quoted by Rodgers himself, one can mention here Christian Topalov , ***Naissance du chomeur 1880-1910", Paris: Albin Michel 1994 or Patrizia Dogliani,*** Un laboratorio del socialismo municipale in Europe. La Francia 1870-1920_, Milano: Franco Angeli, 1992

[4]. It must be underlined how each chapter is usually made of two parts. The first that seizes the theme as developed in Germany or the UK or the other countries considered, thanks to the use of a huge international bibliography; the second that explores the american connections with the other countries. Thanks to this method, Rodgers has produced a book we too rarely know the kind in France, both a textbook and a monograph.

[5]. Though one can share Rodgers' insistence on NYC as a core-city for the reform movement, recent works such as Amy Bridges ***Morning Glories: Municipal Reform in the Southwest***(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997) tend to demonstrate that the spirit of reform was not confined to New England. Were there also connections between Southwest reformers, or others, and Europe? Certainly, places like Wisconsin or California are also present in Rodgers pages, but the lead singer remains the East Coast reform establishment.

[6]. Many other things participate to the "making" of the privilege, such as the existence of specific grants, etc. For example, it has proved easier for me to work on the US-Europe connections in the field of "urban issues" than inside Europe, and this can lead me to neglect the connections amongst european, especially the ones involving countries such as the Netherlands, Switzerland or Belgium.

[7]. On this, see the forthcoming book by Anne Rasmussen, ***L'internationale Scientifique 1890-1914***, to be published at the Editions de la Decouverte.

[8]. For recent views about writing the history of the foundations, see the collection of essays edited by Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, ***Philanthropic Foundations. New Scholarship, New Possibilities*** (Indiana University Press, 1999).

[9]. The activity of the National Association of Housing Officials, with Coleman Woodburry as its executive secretary, takes place in the setting of this 1313 center. When Rodgers uses the work of NAHO in the 1930's (p.465-466), he may lose one part of the picture by not seeing as an element in the largest Rockefeller philanthropic program.

[10]. Eric Lecerf, "Les conferences internationales pour la lutte contre le chomage au debut du sicle", ***Mil Neuf cent***, 7 (1989); and Christian Topalov, "Les reformateurs du chomage et le reseau du Musee Social 1908-1910", in Colette Chambelland (ed); ***Le Musee Social en son temps***, Paris: Presses de l'Ecole Normale Suprieure, 1998.

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