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ROUNDTABLE

Atlantic Crossings Revisited

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Abstract
This roundtable reflects on the 25th anniversary of the publication of Daniel T. Rodgers's *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Harvard, 1998), a classic in our field.

Keywords: U.S. and the world; social politics; transnationalism; Daniel T. Rodgers; historiography

INTRODUCTION

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of Daniel T. Rodgers's *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Harvard, 1998), a classic in our field. With an interest in reflecting on the interventions Rodgers made in the literature, the choices he made to center certain histories rather than others, and the inspiration he gave to so many of us in the early days of transnational history, the *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (JGAPE) convened a roundtable discussion moderated by Robert McGreevey, with Adam Hodges, Amy Kittelstrom, and Noam Maggor. This discussion, which took place in a series of email exchanges over several months in the spring of 2023, has been lightly edited for both clarity and brevity.

PART ONE: Reform Networks

Robert McGreevey (RM): *Atlantic Crossings* has long been a touchstone of our field. Published twenty-five years ago, *Atlantic Crossings* has influenced so many of us working on the Gilded Age and Progressive Era today. I can remember finding *Atlantic Crossings* when I was browsing the shelves of a bookstore in the early 2000s as I was beginning graduate school. I was first drawn in by the focus on labor and social politics but I soon came to appreciate many other things besides, including the book's powerful critique of both American exceptionalism and the parochialism of the U.S. history field more generally. I was inspired by the way Rodgers used a wide-angle lens to bring the reform movements of London, Paris, Berlin, and New York into a single frame. This was a book that spoke to my interests in progressive politics but also pushed me to look beyond the

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boundaries of the United States. What inspired you most when you first read this book? Was there a particular chapter that you now recognize shaped, in part, your own scholarly interests?

Amy Kittelstrom (AK): When *Atlantic Crossings* came out, I was beginning my second year of grad school and already aware of Rodgers as a historian that all my mentors admired. His essays on republicanism and progressivism as well as his book *Contested Truths* (1987) were mentioned as essential reading during my first year of coursework, so I read them over the summer of 1998, marveling at the elegance of his argumentation, the nimbleness of his mind, and his apparent, sunny comfort with conflict.[1] I never could treat republican or progressive ideas as –isms after that.

Naturally, then, I plunged into *Atlantic Crossings* as soon as I could, becoming completely immersed in a history both dynamic and deep. The breadth of Rodgers's research, his level of precision, and his ability to tack back and forth across the ocean with such a wide array of historical characters all dazzled me, with sources in French and German as well as English and a mastery of so many technical details. This empirical work powered an argument that reframed the American Progressive Era as a North Atlantic era when Americans traveled to Europe to learn from English, German, Hungarian, Irish, and Swedish reformers who were way ahead of the Americans, none of whose aim was explicitly the establishment of a welfare state. When I started reading the book, I knew few of the many names, organizations, proposals, and projects mentioned on every page. Yet Rodgers quickly demonstrated how these varied groups interacted within a larger circuit of ideas. What inspired me most when I first read this book was its realized ambition.

No particular chapter shaped my scholarly interests, but his focus on the concrete certainly did. This book emerged only a few months after I had read James T. Kloppenberg's *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (1986).[2] Kloppenberg focuses on the philosophers of what he calls the *via media*, the middle way between idealism and empiricism, intuitionism and utilitarianism, and revolutionary socialism and laissez-faire liberalism. These philosophers were German, French, English, and American, so Kloppenberg's book was a transatlantic history, too, covering many of the same years as Rodgers, pursuing progressive reform as well and also using sources in all three languages. Yet their methods are so different. Kloppenberg's thinkers had some contact with one another, but he centers their texts and how those texts converged, not their relationships, and he bypasses concrete programs altogether. Kloppenberg compared the ideas of his array of thinkers and found what they had in common and how they collectively endeavored to extend equality and build solidarity as part of a larger democratic project that remained theoretical. With technical philosophical vocabulary, abstract concepts, sophisticated ideas, and no shortage of hair-splitting, *Uncertain Victory* is also a book of realized ambition, but a very different ambition from that of Rodgers. Kloppenberg explained and magnified theoretical positions he saw as shared across the Atlantic, where Rodgers followed programs and initiatives that diverged from one another, criss-crossed, combined, and scattered in an irregular patchwork of reform. Kloppenberg's social democracy appeared in developed intellectual theories, where Rodgers's social politics appeared in municipal programs and diverse initiatives. Lumping and splitting are divergent methods that lead to divergent findings as well, although it's worth observing that Rodgers found a via media himself as his reformers "groped … toward what they tended to see as a middle

course between the rocks of cutthroat economic individualism and the shoals of an all-coercive statism."[3]

As a student of Kloppenberg's myself, who agrees with him that philosophy is an important part of history, I could never abandon "intellectuals," which Rodgers claims *Atlantic Crossings*' figures "rarely" were. Yet the vivid social and political relationships Rodgers depicted also shaped my approach to studying past thinkers.[4] Over the development of my own research into democratic thought, I learned to trace the lived intellectual relationships between thinkers in their own time and across time so that I could figure out which ideas came from where and how they changed in different settings of time and place. *Atlantic Crossings* showed me how people learned from one another in the past and how to ground the movement of ideas in actions as well as how to highlight connections and keep multiple concepts and figures active in the development of a historical narrative. Rodgers helped me understand that ideas cross the Atlantic with people, not just books, and that while their relationships may be products of circumstantial times and places, those relationships are also motors of history.

Noam Maggor (NM): Like Amy, I recall learning about *Atlantic Crossings* early in my graduate school days. I don't think it was assigned in any particular class, but we nevertheless knew we all had to read it. It stood out as a model of excellent historical scholarship. It was sophisticated, deeply-researched, wide-ranging, and irresistibly elegant (I guess this word is inescapable in relation to this book). It showed that great history stayed away from heavy handed theoretical jargon and wore its conceptual apparatus lightly. It assumed an audience of intelligent readers not limited to the academy and won them over with effortless prose. Even more than reading the book, I recall debating it with my fellow graduate students. We were not all interested in progressivism and reform, or even in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, but we read the book as a blueprint for where U.S. historiography was moving. As sensible graduate students, we *needed* to take heed.

Two aspects of the book stood out to me in particular: First, we read the book—and it was presented to us—as the best exemplar of a bold new paradigm called "*trans*national history." In this sense, the book marked a sharp, and to be honest quite jarring, departure from the social and labor histories I had been weaned on as an undergraduate, which embraced particular communities or cities as their site and scale of analysis. By contrast, *Atlantic Crossings* called attention to a "web" of "exchange" that connected individuals across vast geographical divides. Although always concrete and textured, this was history at an entirely different altitude. As such, *Atlantic Crossings* was in line with our Early America proseminar, led by Joyce Chaplin, that was framed around Atlantic history and deliberately deemphasized national events such as the American Revolution, or our nineteenth-century U.S. history proseminar, led by Sven Beckert, where we read a great deal of Eric Hobsbawm, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Chris Bayly, as a way of veering us "beyond" the "constraints" of nationalist American historiography. It was ironically only in our readings on post-World War II U.S. history that local studies, inspired by Thomas Sugrue's *Origins of the Urban Crisis* (1996), were becoming more rather than less fashionable.[5]

Second, and relatedly, *Atlantic Crossings* broke decisively from the project of doing "history from below," which had already lost some of its luster but now seemed outright parochial, maybe even quaint. Rodgers's protagonists were not working-class radicals but educated middle-class "reformers" who felt at home in the capitals of Europe. Rodgers rendered these men and women utterly compelling—passionate, conscientious, engaged with the urgent challenges of the age. Far from the party of order, as New Left historians had depicted them, these figures were tireless in their pursuit of deep-seated social change

(Barack Obama had not yet conscripted this phrase). Social history had pitted grassroots movements against the constraints imposed upon them from above. For Rodgers, progressive change came *from above*. As Amy explained, it was dense networks of knowledge, expertise, and budding social science—nourished and validated by the transatlantic circulation of ideas—that provided necessary leverage for political and social influence. Dispensing with the question of class formation, the book inspired a new fascination with the intricate forging of "networks" as a focal point of historical inquiry.

Overall, the combination of these two innovations allowed *Atlantic Crossings* to capture and shape the intellectual mood of the late 1990s and early 2000s. It seemed almost unquestionable at that point that cosmopolitan engagement across geographical divides yielded not only different but in fact superior perspectives, as well as antidotes to what were increasingly viewed as American pathologies. It deserved to be recovered not only as a historical force but as a guide for political action in the present. Here was a usable history for a new generation of progressives—ourselves!—who thrived in a globalizing world and no longer assumed good things came primarily or even partially from empowered working-class communities or homegrown political traditions. Needless to say, in a variety of ways the best hopes for this type of cosmopolitanism proved naïve and probably misguided. They were for sure derailed by the events of the coming decade, starting with the Iraq War and then global financial crisis and its aftermath, which recast transnational forces in a much more somber light.

Adam Hodges (AH): I was in graduate school in 1998 when Rodgers published *Atlantic Crossings*. However, although I was aware of the book, it didn't influence me until years later. I first encountered Rodgers's work while learning U.S. labor historiography during my MA degree. From the pencil marking inside the front cover, it looks like I paid $3 at a used bookstore for a well-read copy of *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850–1820*. This 1978 book began life as Rodgers's dissertation and it is still in print in paperback today.[6] He was then part of the wave of U.S. scholars adapting E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (published in 1963 in Britain) to the forging of working-class affinity and culture during their own nation's industrial revolution. However, unlike the social historians of the era engaged in this project, such as Herbert Gutman and David Montgomery, Rodgers put forth a different approach from the first sentence of his book: "This is at bottom a study not of work but of ideas about work."[7]

Rodgers has an extraordinary gift for laying out the strands of major ideas and then tracing their lived and written history. Perhaps no article did more to make me sound better read than I actually was in graduate school than "Republicanism: the Career of a Concept," published in the *Journal of American History* in 1992, in which Rodgers broke this ubiquitous, yet elusive, idea into three successive intellectual paradigms.[8] However, I'm more grateful to him for confirming that my confusion over the Progressive Era, the very period I was supposedly training to be a scholar of, was unavoidable, and that the construct persisted despite doubts over its very existence since at least the 1970s. I still recommend his 1982 *Reviews in American History* article "In Search of Progressivism" to students.[9]

Before Rodgers could explore "social politics" in *Atlantic Crossings*, he had to tackle the many meanings of progressivism. To later transcend the concept, he had to first redefine it. The ongoing confusion, he asserted in the article, "stems from the attempt to capture the progressives within a static ideological frame" instead of seeing that those who adopted the term to describe themselves by 1910–11 had "an ability to draw on … three distinct social languages to articulate their discontents and their social visions:" "the rhetoric of

antimonopolism," "an emphasis on social bonds," and "the language of social efficiency." The three languages did not cohere as one ideology; in fact, they "did not add up at all." These "three distinct clusters of ideas" had their own historical trajectories and were combined, or discarded, in unique combinations.[10] It is an ingenious and fluid construct that can still explain to students how Frederick Winslow Taylor and Frances Perkins could both advocate for workplace reform at the same time and under the same banner of progressivism, yet with radically different goals. Rodgers insisted that "to think of progressive social thought in this way is to emphasize the active, dynamic aspect of ideas. It is also to admit, finally, that progressivism as an ideology is nowhere to be found."[11]

In *Atlantic Crossings*, Rodgers worked on a larger canvas in both temporal and geographic terms. Stretching from the 1870s to the 1940s, *Atlantic Crossings* tells the story of reformers bound by a "social politics" who formed networks that differed by specific concern but had larger ameliorative goals in common. The real innovation was that these networks would not be confined to America. As Rodgers put it, "the reconstruction of American social politics was of a part with movements of politics and ideas throughout the North Atlantic world that trade and capitalism had tied together."[12]

When I finally did read *Atlantic Crossings*, years after graduate school while writing a book on urban competition in the United States over power and resources during the unprecedented opportunity of coast-to-coast mobilization for war production during World War I, it was certainly the right book at the right time.[13] I was looking for ideas on writing city-level history in a global context and I was excited to read what I assumed was the big book Rodgers was destined to write on the Progressive Era, happily a transnational one. I opened to the back so I could skip straight to the World War I chapter, which surely must come at the end, only to find it in the middle! So much of the book dealt with those who sought, in concert across borders, to reshape the industrial city that I was able to find my wartime characters and factions in the middle of a much longer story. I learned of a global flow of ideas into and out of cities, and also how to reposition World War I at the center, not the end, of a "Progressive Age."

PART TWO: The Transnational Turn

RM: You have all given us a lot to think about already, including Rodgers's trailblazing transnational approach. As we move forward with our discussion, we have an opportunity to reflect further on the impact of *Atlantic Crossings* on the U.S. history field. Soon after the book was published, Michael Katz noted Rodgers's pathbreaking approach in a review for the *American Historical Review*, writing that for Rodgers "American social politics … originated not in 'nation-state containers' but 'in the world between them.'"[14] Thomas Haskell, in his review published in 2000, predicted "The profession will be particularly well served if the rising clamor for 'transnational' history takes as its model a book as scrupulous and as resistant to passing panaceas as this one."[15] How do you see the impact of *Atlantic Crossings* on our field?

AH: It is challenging to assess the impact of *Atlantic Crossings* as an individual work after 1998, as it was an extraordinary example of what might be possible during a moment when the term "transnational" was coming into vogue and the *La Pietra Report* issued by the Organization of American Historians elevated such a shift in teaching and research to the level of urgency. Led by Thomas Bender, who also wrote the text of the report, dozens of scholars from around the world—including Rodgers—met at a villa in Florence named

La Pietra three times from 1997–2000 to craft recommendations toward, as the first section after the preface was titled: "RETHINKING AMERICAN HISTORY IN A GLOBAL AGE." The report pushed the profession to fundamentally reorient undergraduate and graduate education in history and reorganize departments and scholarship. In a relatively brief text, the word "transnational" appears eighteen times.[16] Bender followed the 2000 report with an edited volume, borrowing that bold report section heading for the 2002 book's title. The work had conference participants model a path forward for scholarship and Rodgers contributed an essay titled "An Age of Social Politics."[17]

While *Atlantic Crossings* was conceived and researched before the La Pietra meetings, Harvard published it during that multi-year process. The book was a powerful symbol of the push for a global U.S. history. In a section titled "The U.S. History Survey Course," which in my view is perhaps the most fundamental point of contact between scholars and the public, Bender writes that, "The Progressive Movement and New Deal might be contextualized as part of an international age of social politics."[18] Of all the voices involved in the La Pietra meetings, Rodgers appears to have placed his interpretive stamp on these key topics, perhaps even the larger period that encompasses them. However, over two decades later, the survey is undoubtably more global, but probably does not deeply evoke "an international age of social politics."

Eric Foner's *Give Me Liberty!*, the most popular text according to Norton, is sticking with a Progressive Era chapter that begins at the turn of the twentieth century, ends the year before the United States enters World War I, and focuses largely on the United States itself.[19] Oxford's *American Horizons: U.S. History in a Global Context* does what it says on the tin and the authors have not forgotten Rodgers. The first section of the chapter "An Age of Progressive Reform, 1890–1920" is titled: "Progressivism as a Global Movement." When we get to the 1930s, however, the chapter titled "A New Deal for Americans, 1931–1939" emphasizes internationalism more in the domain of foreign policy than social politics.[20] I don't envy the authors their task; those of us who teach the survey know that encouraging transnational thinking is one of the most daunting *and* essential learning goals.

Atlantic Crossings faced another important challenge from the outset. Scholars such as Ian Tyrrell seemed to be pushing our view of transnational reform networks in another direction. His essay in the 2002 Bender volume was titled "Beyond the View from Euro-America: Environment, Settler Societies, and the Internationalization of American History." His book *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (2010), part of Princeton's "America in the World" series, begins with the section "Networks of Empire." It feels like a direct, if unstated, reaction to Rodgers and contains the chapters "Webs of Communication" and "Missionary Lives, Transnational Networks." While Rodgers examined transnational reform efforts he saw largely as ameliorative, Tyrrell investigates a more grim and repressive dynamic instead. "The relationship between Protestant reformers' aspiration to create a more Christian and moral world on the one hand and the emergence of American imperialism and colonialism beginning in 1898 on the other is at the heart of what follows."[21] Marilyn Lake's *Progressive New World: How Settler Colonialism and Transpacific Exchange Shaped American Reform* (2019) is in a similar vein.[22] This might be the closest to a "Pacific Crossings" that we'll get. While Australia could seem like a minor partner in a coalition Rodgers titled "Atlantic," Lake argued that its importance was fundamental and formative, and expands Tyrrell's dim view of moral progressives to a broader array of reform. *Ameliorative for whom?* is the question these books seem to push us to ask of progressive initiatives.

None of this work discredits the accomplishments of *Atlantic Crossings*; in fact, it affirms the book's status as a major influence in the field. Yet, it is important to note that some scholars have pushed away from Rodgers's positive message about reform. It strikes me that *period* plays a role here. Alan Lawson's book *A Commonwealth of Hope: The New Deal Response to Crisis* (2006) has an interpretive tone congruent with Rodgers and it is evident from the first sentence: "The New Deal stands as the most comprehensive moment of national reform in American history, the culmination of the American progressive tradition."[23] The Progressive Era was a formative stage in the process of building the New Deal. While Lawson also seeks to establish that reformers "sought to build in the American grain" so he can prove that the New Deal emerged from established tradition and was not an aberration born of emergency, the long view owes much to Rodgers and Lawson gives *Atlantic Crossings* two glowing mentions in his "Essay on Sources."[24]

In my view, the most important book to build upon Rodgers as a positive influence is Leon Fink's *The Long Gilded Age: American Capitalism and the Lessons of a New World Order* (2015). Fink served as editor of the most important labor history journal in the United States from its founding in 2004 until just recently and has long pushed scholars in his field to take a more transnational view. The journal was founded to integrate study of the working class in the Americas across nations and has in recent years become yet more global. In the book, published about the same time that *Labor* dropped "Americas" from its title, Fink sought to focus more clearly on working-class politics than had Rodgers. He set out "to demonstrate that American outcomes offered but one set of variants within a worldwide confrontation between the capitalist marketplace and those determined to transform it according to socially defined ends" and "that American labor radicals and reformers were themselves intensely aware of the larger menu of historical and political possibilities of their age."[25] In his third chapter, "The University and Industrial Reform," Fink invokes *Atlantic Crossings* as "monumental." "Supplementing Rodgers' analysis with particular attention to labor issues," Fink writes, "I compare and contrast the sources of what might be called 'radical reform' ideas in the U.S. with those in Britain and Germany."[26]

The influence of *Atlantic Crossings* over the last twenty-five years can be seen in these two dramatically different ways of viewing reformers. Yet bringing the vision of this book, and even more so the intellectual movement toward transnational history of which it was an important part, into the core of the discipline's teaching continues to be an ongoing project.

AK: My initial experience of reading *Atlantic Crossings*—and Rodgers in general—feels amplified and reinforced by these differing perspectives, which cross that same ocean and expand my awareness of Rodgers's reach. Noam shares my fascination with the web of lived intellectual exchange Rodgers brings to life, and Adam spells out why my students have never heard me refer to progressivism as any unitary program my entire teaching career. Yet our readings of *Atlantic Crossings* differ in a fundamental respect. Noam reports having felt briefly optimistic in light of the cosmopolitan exchange Rodgers described, hopeful in the possibility for progress at the turn of the millennium. He describes the book as a "usable history" for those "who thrived in a globalizing world." Adam, too, took away from the book a "positive message about reform," but I did not see it that way.

Rodgers certainly showcased a cast of conscientious characters who sought to make workers' lives better on both sides of the Atlantic, but the reforms themselves appear to have been almost adventitious. Which initiative got implemented where and how depended on interweaving causes and connections from which no optimal system emerged. Germany enforced some impressive measures by fiat, England some by political and industrial organization, Sweden and Ireland by interesting cooperatives, while the United States, student of them all, created a gap-ridden non-system of variously leveraged schemes that benefited some and not others with temporary partial fixes that briefly, during the New Deal, even impressed European observers. None of these countries were seeking to build a welfare state, Rodgers argues, and while the conditions that spurred social reform involved dire, blatant, and widespread human suffering, the reforms did not arise because of "need."[27] The colliding and sometimes cooperating ambitions of political, labor, and social leaders produced irregular advances and enterprises of reform. Each initiative depended on so many shifting factors to come into existence that few could last. Their vestiges, Rodgers wrote a quarter century ago, were tucked away here and there "in today's much more smug and insular America."[28] All these years after his grim assessment, such vestiges can be hard to spot, while what were once called Hoovervilles are now American urban life as usual.

Atlantic Crossings seems more useful for historians studying the past than for reformers seeking to change the future, and as Adam points out, it emerged amid a surge of interest among American historians in transnational work to unloose them from their parochial frameworks. It would be overblown to give Rodgers credit for every "America in the World" job listing of the early 2000s, or for the awareness of borderlands that arose after the transnational turn, but *Atlantic Crossings* undoubtedly met a warm reception as a glittering exemplar of how transnational work ought to be done, following the sources where they lead and not regarding national boundaries as intellectual limits. It is so generative a work that its impact can only be indicated, not determined.

In addition to the works Adam mentions, several monographs in American intellectual history owe clear debts to Rodgers. Leslie Butler's *Critical Americans: Victorian Intellectuals and Transatlantic Liberal Reform* (2007) reconstructs the intellectual relationships between the Americans George William Curtis, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, James Russell Lowell, and Charles Eliot Norton with a range of British intellectuals including John Stuart Mill, Thomas Carlyle, and Matthew Arnold.[29] Together, these thinkers articulated a moderate ideal of educative citizenship through print and the advocacy of temperance in foreign policy as in personal conduct. Brooke L. Blower's *Becoming Americans in Paris: Transatlantic Politics and Culture between the World Wars* (2011), similarly reconstructs the relationships of Americans—and American political issues—in the interwar Parisian milieu.[30] Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen brings the transnational approach of Kloppenberg and Rodgers together with a focus on the reception of ideas in *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas* (2012), which shows how philosophical thinking also crossed the ocean: Emerson to Nietzsche, Nietzsche to American philosophers, theologians, poets, and rebels, all creating culture as they went.[31] These historians and others followed Rodgers in liberating themselves from a strictly national framework to pursue a fuller, transnational history, which is to say a truer history.

As Adam observes, an untold number of historians have instead looked away from Rodgers's transnational beacon and refused to update their understanding of these critical years of reform. Shelton Stromquist, in *Reinventing "the People": The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism* (2005), returned the

spotlight to American heroes and to an exceptionalist American history, rooted in class conflict.[32] Historian Eric Rauchway argues for American exceptionalism in explicit contrast to Rodgers even while reaching beyond the Atlantic world to the globe in *Blessed among Nations: How the World Made America* (2006).[33] More recently, Lisa McGirr uses a strictly nationalist lens in her 2016 history of Prohibition, a subject that might have been included among the social reforms Rodgers investigated in *Atlantic Crossings* except that it contradicted his anti-exceptionalist thrust.[34] As co-editor with Eric Foner of *American History Now* (2011), an overview of then-current historiography, McGirr chose a nationalist framework for her own contribution. While the volume included a section on "The United States in the World," this proved the exception to the parochial rule, suggesting Americanists need not engage with other national histories and historiographies.[35]

Yet on a topic not even touched upon in *Atlantic Crossings*, Rodgers has had a significant impact. Colonialism lies behind the framework for the book—how else could New Zealand get included?—but Rodgers had too much to do parsing out the hows and whys of social insurance proposals and workers' housing endeavors to explore the imperialistic characters of the nations he treated strictly as laboratories for social politics. Among the historians working on imperialism and inspired by Rodgers, Kornel Chang shifts the focus from the Atlantic to the Pacific in his book *Pacific Connections: The Making of U.S.-Canadian Borderlands* (2012), a work so clearly indebted to Rodgers that the cover features an ocean liner—a trans-Pacific steamer with a Native dinghy in the foreground.[36] Chang's awareness of how not all Pacific oars pulled in the same direction was amplified in the collection of essays edited by Kristin L. Hoganson and Jay Sexton, *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (2020), a snapshot of how many scholars are working transnational terrain currently.[37] Another important historian to follow the cue both Rodgers and Kloppenberg gave to look beyond North American shores for democratic meaning is Nico Slate, whose *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (2012) brought twentieth-century African American and South Asian history into a common frame to tell a novel story of solidarity.[38] Together, these works widen historians' focus to engage the wider imperialist context.

NM: Adam and Amy have offered broad assessments of *Atlantic Crossings*' wide-ranging impact while also noting the resilience of earlier approaches. But the book's influence extended beyond the history of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era or the United States and the world. I want to use the opportunity to reflect on the book's resonance in two adjacent subfields with which I am most familiar: the history of capitalism and the history of the state. These two subfields emerged and thrived in the years after the publication of *Atlantic Crossings* and in dialogue with the Atlantic paradigm. They both affirmed the key insights of the book but also subverted them in interesting ways. This is a tribute to the richness of Rodgers's analysis and to the unexpected nonlinear manner in which a thriving historiography develops.

The pivotal chapter in *Atlantic Crossings* for both historians of capitalism and historians of the state is the chapter on what Rodgers calls the progressives' "quarrel with laissez faire" and with the notion of a "self-acting, self-regulating market."[39] In this chapter, Rodgers narrates how exposure to German culture and German universities "knocked the provincial blinkers off" for a generation of young Americans, who later went on to become prominent reformers.[40] Their experience on the European continent inspired them to question the dogmas of classical political economy, with its emphasis

on free trade, private property, and nonstate intervention. They came to embrace a more robust conception of "the social" and rethought the role of government in economic life. Against the abstract timeless principles of nineteenth-century economic liberalism, derived from Adam Smith, these Americans learned instead "to think historically, contextually, and empirically about economic policy."[41]

The "new" history of capitalism began to take off in the mid to late 2000s and fully absorbed Rodgers's transnational perspective. It was self-evident that capitalism could no longer be narrated through or contained by a nationalist frame. American capitalism, like capitalism generally, had global origins and needed to be told as part of a global history. This literature, however, moved to cast Atlantic connections in a much darker light. The search for transnational links quickly led to the history of slavery and to the foremost article crossing the Atlantic in the nineteenth century: cotton. To take two obvious examples, Walter Johnson and Sven Beckert's books on these topics, which were in other ways very different, both departed from earlier nationalist frames to offer hemispheric and global perspectives.[42] Most strikingly, they revealed the American South, traditionally understood as the most parochial of all regions of the United States, to have been a cosmopolitan crux in an international trading system. They repositioned the South at the core of global capitalism and part and parcel with an Atlantic industrial revolution.

Following Rodgers's lead, these accounts literally "knocked the provincial blinkers off" U.S. historiography. They delivered on Rodgers's promise to make U.S. history less insular and less parochial. But they also raised critical questions: If we take the trans-Atlanticism of cotton seriously, the U.S. economy was born "global." In what sense, then, could nineteenth-century Americans ever be thought of as provincial in ways that needed to be dislodged by a generation of German-educated reformers? Was not classical political economy itself an intellectual import to the United States and the product of earlier transoceanic exchanges? Could "networks"—Rodgers's favorite metaphor for the loose and often informal discourses and influences that his book charted—in fact be a source of power and even domination? And, as already emphasized in Amy's comments about the Pacific, could far-flung connections be the wellspring of, not progressive change and relaxation of nationalist narrow-mindedness, but of exploitation, violence, and dispossession? To put it another way, once historians followed the evidence beyond national boundaries, as Rodgers had advocated, the "networks" led in all sorts of directions geographically as well as temporally.

Historians of the state, another subfield that emerged in the early 2000s, picked up Rodgers's discussion of the "quarrel with laissez faire" in a different way. Rodgers identified the grip of classical liberalism on American ideas to have been "the most formidable intellectual obstacle to social politics."[43] Historians of the state agreed. They responded with a remarkably successful quest to unearth and catalogue the longstanding involvement of the state in American social and economic life. As Bill Novak confidently announced in his canonical essay in the *American Historical Review*, the weakness of the American state is nothing but a myth. In fact, the American state has always been "powerful, capacious, tenacious, interventionist, and redistributive."[44] In this sense, the champions of laissez faire in America were indeed, as Rodgers called them, nothing but "propagandists."[45]

But whereas for Rodgers European influences were crucial in inspiring a new form of "social politics," historians of the state saw the comparison of the American state to its European counterparts to be a constraint that obscured more than it revealed. Rodgers at one point dismisses the notion that American social politics might have had native origins in "the prairies of Illinois" or more generally in "the traditions and economic realities of

America itself."[46] Any insistence on the Americanness of progressive ideas, he argues, was an after-the-fact effort to legitimize them for U.S. constituencies, especially after Germany had become a bitter geopolitical foe in the twentieth century. By contrast, Novak and other historians of the state trace the sources of the modern American state to homegrown democratic traditions and institutions, going back to court decisions such as *Munn v. Illinois* (1876) that dictated that property "clothed with public interest … must submit to be controlled by the public for the common good." Moreover, they lament the hegemony of Weberian-inflected theories about the modern state that have cast it as "something of a Prussian 'tank': unstoppable, impenetrable, autonomous, mechanically bureaucratized, and manned by a regimented officialdom driving it down undeviating tracks."[47] Taking this idealized version of European states as a baseline and model for what state capacity as such looked like, they argue, has been detrimental to our understanding of the specificities of American political institutions, which drew their strength from their democratic and socially-embedded infrastructural power.

Overall, the trajectories of the history of capitalism and history of the state demonstrate both the triumph of *Atlantic Crossings* in setting up a methodological and thematic agenda for historians of the United States, beyond the direct intervention in the history of progressivism, as well as the way new research transcended and challenged Rodgers's fundamental rubrics. It seems to me that this is a model for healthy and constructive historiographical debate.

PART THREE: Colonialism, Race, and Gender

RM: As you all have pointed out, a new generation of scholars has built on Rodgers's transnational method to deepen our knowledge in numerous subfields including intellectual history, labor history, the history of capitalism, and the history of the state—in both the Atlantic and Pacific worlds. How has the field evolved in other ways as well since *Atlantic Crossings* was published, particularly with regard to colonialism, race, and gender? How do newer works continue to add dimension and complexity by both extending and challenging Rodgers's original contribution?

AH: Before looking at scholarly evolution *after* the publication of *Atlantic Crossings*, we should make the point that Rodgers largely ignored the already well-developed literature on reform debates and networks among women in this period. H-Net organized a review symposium of Rodgers's book that likely constituted the first collective scholarly reaction to its publication. Sonya Michel's contribution is still essential reading. Although she did praise the book, Michel lamented the missed opportunity to better integrate gender politics. She singled out the campaign for protective legislation for women, which "provides another 'ideal case' for comparativists, for common ideas form a constant whose application varied widely from one setting to another." She pointed out that Ulla Wikander, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Jane Lewis had already edited a comparative collection of essays that Rodgers had little used: *Protecting Women: Labor Legislation in Europe, the United States, and Australia, 1880–1920*.[48] The lack of integration here is odd considering Rodgers's assertion of the importance of maternalist internationalism early in *Atlantic Crossings*: "Standing consciously to the side of the nationalist rivalries over social politics, with an international network second only to the socialists' in extent and efficiency, social maternalists formed yet another organizing pole around which social politics might gather."[49] He does not create a central role for socialists either,

though their transnational networks and perspectives were also both relevant, as Rodgers admits, and already much studied.

Maternalist activism is clearly, however, a more natural fit for this particular book in the realm of ideas, which has always been the focus of Rodgers's work. As Michel observed, "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." This dynamic is clearly very relevant to the mission of the book and would not have necessitated inquiry into an entirely new strand of reform, for he surely had many already. On this, Michel should have the final word: "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."[50]

Michel did mention the marginal role of racial politics in *Atlantic Crossings*, particularly prior to the New Deal years, though in reference to the fundamental importance of Jim Crow, rather than colonialism more broadly.[51] Amy discussed this problem earlier in this forum and it is of such great importance that I'd like to return to it. I feel confident asserting that any review written now, a quarter of a century later, would find fault with the author for not integrating analysis of colonialism into the discourses of social politics despite a focus on the period when the imperialism of Britain, France, Germany, and the United States reached an apex. Going forward, I expect much more exploration of how transnational progressive ideas intersect with those undergirding colonialism. As Marilyn Lake has stated in her book *Progressive New World*: "The interpretative framework of settler colonialism helps make sense of, and brings into one analytical lens, progressivism's constitutive contradictions. The project of progressive reform was imbued with settler colonialism's 'regime of race,' which informed the ascendant politics of 'whiteness.'"[52] Although David R. Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness* was published in 1991 and quickly generated a great deal of attention, *Atlantic Crossings* is evidence that the global implications of Roediger's work on racial ideologies, and that of other scholars which soon followed, were not yet of inescapably central importance to the transnational project.[53]

Transnational anticolonial organizing driven by Black activists has received considerably more attention by scholars since *Atlantic Crossings* and has offered a productive challenge to the historical meaning of reform in the same period. As recently as 2014, Adam Ewing found it necessary to argue that Garveyism was worth taking seriously as an international movement. In *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics*, Ewing brings to life the fascinating story of how Garveyites operated strategically under colonial rule in Africa, pursuing real reform while organizing toward liberation. In one chapter, Ewing describes "the efforts of a cadre of clerks, ministers, traders, and workers in the central African colonies of Nyasaland (Malawi) and Northern Rhodesia to nurture the movement behind a guise of cautious reformism and under the watchful eyes of the state." They built and connected "Native Welfare Associations," which intentionally appeared to uplift organizations friendly to colonial regimes while really utilizing Garveyism "because it invested their parochial politics with a diasporic identity and a global vision – with the promise of a far-reaching network of compatriots."[54] There is a growing community of scholars working in this direction and Ewing co-edited, with Ronald J. Stephens, a volume of essays titled *Global Garveyism* in 2019.[55] As these scholars remind us, race and colonialism are essential to understanding reform efforts

in this period, and so is expanding our view of what reform meant and who was in transnational pursuit of it.

It would be a shame, however, to conclude with the book's omissions instead of the constructive impact of its ambitious framework. I believe that Rodgers's book has helped scholars to examine transnational social politics in new ways that continue to demonstrate the importance of the original work. Tore C. Olsson published *Agrarian Crossings: Reformers and the Remaking of the U.S. and Mexican Countryside* in 2017, and the title alone is evidence of the inspiration gleaned from Rodgers's book.[56] Olsson argued that historians need to understand 1930s agrarian reform work in the two nations together, not just in terms of state policy, but also through a cross-border flow of reform work and inspiration. Olsson asserted that plantation structures and conditions in the U.S. South and Mexico had much more in common than historians understood, and that the two nations were influenced by each other's attempts at reform. Olsson found that the rural approach of the New Deal was influenced by the Mexican Revolution and that the Mexican government was then influenced by the Tennessee Valley Authority. Olsson demonstrates how nonstate actors helped drive reform and experimentation that could persist even when government ambition diminished.

Rodgers continued pushing the transnational turn forward well after *Atlantic Crossings* was published. In response to the Iraq War, he wrote an essay titled "American Exceptionalism Revisited" for *Raritan* in 2004. Early in the piece, he emphasized that exceptionalist narratives were by no means distinctively American. After briefly identifying the key types of these national stories, he launched into a much longer explanation of the hopeful emergence of a "post-exceptionalist" history driven by transnational work. "In three areas the destabilization of familiar analytical boundaries and narratives has been particularly striking: the history of immigration, the history of the frontier, and the history of politics."[57] Within these categories, he focused on "diaspora," "borderlands," and scholars who were refocusing political history around the state, invoking Theda Skocpol's phrase "bring the state back in," rather than "national values."[58] As the ideology of American exceptionalism continues to have a powerful hold on our political culture, the interconnectedness of social politics in the face of global problems that transcend nation has never been more relevant to our understanding of the past. *Atlantic Crossings* advanced the early transnational project and it remains an ambitious and influential work that historians, including Rodgers himself, have continued to build upon.

AK: My recent reading of Caroline Elkins's monumental *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (2022) had been on my mind while rereading *Atlantic Crossings*, so I appreciate Adam's point that colonialism is a shadow in Rodgers's book.[59] The contradictions Adam and Marilyn Lake consider constitutive of progressivism constitute liberalism as well. Elkins shows how liberal functionaries such as John Stuart Mill administered the empire in the name of progress, and Rodgers depicts how a variety of nontraditionalists sought to accommodate modern workers to the industrial machine borne of the capitalism generated by empire. Rodgers may write in an upbeat voice, but his story is not cheerful. When Rodgers quoted one of his historical figures decrying "late capitalism" in the 1920s, he induced a groan at the turn of the millennium among readers who had thought Reagan ushered in late capitalism during a political era Rodgers later took up in *Age of Fracture* (2011).[60] For readers of *Atlantic Crossings* in the current age of surging capitalist-colonialism, where zones of economic activity lie beyond the reach of

any nation's laws, as described in Quinn Slobodian's *Crack-Up Capitalism* (2023), the so-called late capitalism sketched by the likes of Rodgers and John Dos Passos in the *U.S.A. Trilogy* (1937) looks like a baby dragon.[61] A very scary baby dragon.

Tasking Rodgers on race and gender is necessary for a work billing itself as covering such a broad subject as "social politics," and I appreciate the voices Adam brings in to help do so. At the same time, I think that Rodgers's framing indicates that his quarry is above or beside such social constructs: He is after social structures (which do involve ideas). Rodgers defines social politics as the effort "[t]o limit the socially self-destructive effects of morally unhindered capitalism, to extract from those markets the tasks they had demonstrably bungled, to counterbalance the markets' atomizing social effects with a countercalculus of the public weal."[62] The focus of *Atlantic Crossings* on the mechanics of these limiting efforts reveals an engineer's mind at work, the B.A. training Rodgers brought into his graduate work in history. This technical orientation explains his facility in describing the genesis and operation of such a cascade of social schemes aiming to ameliorate the conditions of industrial capitalism, while leaving untouched the motivation for seeking this alleviation. Rodgers sought to understand neither the scope of citizenship nor the factors behind white male rule; yet these questions are still embedded in the technical schema he explored on such a grand scale.

Although ideas lie behind all the social programs Rodgers describes, his relationship with the field of modern intellectual history is not straightforward. His publications all indicate a deep preoccupation with concepts, the stuff of which intellectual history is made. Accordingly, when David D. Hall was the editor of the *Intellectual History Newsletter*—the homespun precursor to *Modern Intellectual History* (2004)—he invited Rodgers to review Kloppenberg's *Uncertain Victory* (1986).[63] Rodgers complied, labeling Kloppenberg a "shepherd" and himself an "interloper," distinguishing himself as doing something different from what Kloppenberg later termed "pragmatic hermeneutics."[64] Yet while Rodgers contributed twice more to the *IHN* and received a review of *Atlantic Crossings* there, he did not identify as an intellectual historian, it seems, giving him a curious bearing on the field.[65] When Rodgers described *Atlantic Crossings*'s historical figures as "rarely intellectuals," his own choices of Richard T. Ely, Jane Addams, W. E. B. Du Bois, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, H. G. Wells, and Rexford Tugwell belied his characterization.[66] Rodgers's bone to pick seems to be with the view that intellectuals are a human type set apart from the rest of society. This view was depicted in David A. Hollinger's contribution to the Wingspread conference, which is famous among intellectual historians for its inauguration of a "new" intellectual history that aimed to correct for the oversights of the "old," outdated intellectual history, most notably the concept of an amorphous "American mind" that floated above the people, manifesting in one thinker's works and then in another's, developmentally.[67] Neither Hollinger nor Rodgers would have any of that, but Rodgers would also not accept Hollinger's claim that the discourses of special peoples called intellectuals were more important than other factors in society. Rodgers is instead interested in how things worked.

Workings, mechanisms, mobility, motion—these are some of Rodgers's own keywords. He finds division and fracture and only temporary coalitions in every phenomenon he studies. This is most obvious in *Age of Fracture*, but Adam is right to accentuate Rodgers's work on American exceptionalism, which establishes the groundwork for his *As a City on a Hill* (2018), a history of the shifting meaning of America's most famous sermon—John Winthrop's lay sermon reportedly delivered aboard the *Arbella* in 1630—and how its history helps illustrate how nationalism breeds exceptionalism wherever it arises.[68] This book challenges conventional historical wisdom: "Coming in search of

origins and certainty, you find everything—text, identities, keywords, and meaning—in motion."[69] Rodgers offers a kaleidoscope of interpretation and causation.

As Noam noted earlier, Rodgers aimed to remove the "blinkers" preventing American historians from seeing transnational connections.[70] Yet Rodgers retained blinkers of his own—invisible, it seems, to him, but important for current and future historians to perceive. When Rodgers wrote a summary essay for a landmark collection of essays in American intellectual history in 2017, he wrote as one triumphant. "Motion is a central motif in intellectual history now," he declared.[71] Every work he chose for his capacious and incisive overview seemed to agree. Yet as he covered an array of recent scholarship, he characterized American cultural-intellectual siloes in a telling way. "Ethnic communities" lived in enclaves, he said, and "African Americans lived in starkly race-segregated worlds of social experience, churches, and schooling."[72] Here I would like to offer two important correctives. First, the very name of Ralph Waldo Ellison (1914–1994) indicates that African American thinkers, laborers, artists, and reformers were not people set apart from (white) mainstream thought, no matter how white Americans discriminated against and avoided them. They worked for white bosses, browsed white-curated bookshelves, cleaned white-owned homes, and listed to white voices. They were not intellectually siloed off. Ellison's father named him after Ralph Waldo Emerson because he had prized Emerson's democratic individualism himself. The Ellison example could easily be multiplied from Olaudah Equiano to Barack Obama to bury Rodgers's claim of African American isolation in an avalanche of counter-evidence.

Second, it is white Americans who have been intellectually siloed off. Most white Americans in the twentieth century and beyond have lived in a much more starkly racially-ethnically segregated environment than the African Americans Rodgers describes. White Americans have chosen this self-segregation much more systematically than any other American ethno-racial group. By making *Atlantic Crossings* neutral on race, ethnicity, gender, and class—Addams and Du Bois circulating on the same terms as Ely and the Webbs—Rodgers treated movements for civil rights as set apart from social politics. Perhaps this was necessary for him to keep all the reform projects he studied in one frame. If he had inquired into what lay behind the movements for women's suffrage and against Jim Crow, however, he would have seen those movements' commonality with the drive for workers' minimal welfare, the unifying notion of human rights that has countered fracture in American intellectual history and has been shared across the Atlantic.

NM: Adam and Amy covered a lot of ground in their responses and their reflections on the absence of attention to race, gender, and empire in *Atlantic Crossings*. My previous comments touched on how historians of capitalism and historians of the state learned from Rodgers but also challenged some of his key arguments by extending their own purview both geographically and temporally. Overall, it is in the nature of "networks" that they extend across divides. It is therefore somewhat predictable that what they illuminate for historians at one point—radically expanding the historical purview—looks in retrospect to have been far too limited.

I would like to add one last notable omission from the book, namely *populism*. Almost by design, the book marginalizes the populist movement from the narrative about American reform. The antimonopoly impulse of the populist movement that Rodgers had previously counted as one of three core "language[s] of discontent" in his landmark essay on progressivism gets almost no attention in *Atlantic Crossings*. Rodgers defined

antimonopoly as "the oldest" and "most peculiarly American" of the three (alongside the language on social bonds and the language of efficiency).[73] As such, it would have been an odd fit in a book about *new* ideas inspired by *Atlantic* exchanges. Nevertheless, some discussion of populism—and populist encounters with emerging Atlantic exchanges about reform—would have been illuminating. It would have complicated a narrative framed about a departure from entrenched nineteenth-century classical liberalism to instead highlight competing visions of progress. It also would have explored tensions and fractures in an increasingly interconnected Atlantic world that we are now, especially in the aftermath of 2016, all too familiar with. Needless to say, populism has made a huge comeback in recent years as a scholarly topic of inquiry, a concept within the social sciences, and a global phenomenon. In the age of Google, Apple, and Amazon, anti-monopoly has regained political relevance, drawing attention from legal scholars and heterodox economists. Historians, including historians of the United States, have been caught largely off guard, with some notable exceptions.[74] A recent reassessment of global history now laments historians' excessive embrace of "the empathetic power of a cosmopolitan spirit"—of which Rodgers was a herald—at the expense of greater attention to grassroots domestic forces.[75]

More generally, scholars who attended to the agrarian origins of reform have challenged Rodgers's focus on the Atlantic as the source of progressivism. They have shown that in policy areas that mattered most to farmers, it was Europeans who had the most to learn from Americans rather than the other way around. In her brilliant *Land of Too Much*, Monica Prasad makes her disagreement with Rodgers explicit. She asks: "What would our vision of Progressivism look like if it had been shaped by comparisons among the things that interested farmers, rather than comparisons among the things that interested urban middle class reformers?"[76] She points to an American state that taxed income, property, and inheritance earlier and at higher rates than its European analogs. She discusses a state that regulated corporations more rigorously than its French, German, and English counterparts. She points to a state that broadened access to credit and often sided with debtors over creditors in ways unfathomable across the ocean (and elsewhere around the world). Elizabeth Sanders's meticulous analysis of Congressional legislation and votes in *Roots of Reform* demonstrates the crucial contribution of rural representatives, often in direct opposition to those from urban districts, in the enactment of progressive income taxation, the Federal Reserve, antitrust policy, and government oversight of corporations.[77] By discarding European standards for what counted as progress and analyzing the U.S. state on its own terms—something I touched on previously—this literature raises questions about whether Rodgers dug for progressivism in the right places.

CONCLUSION

RM: In the twenty-five years since its publication, *Atlantic Crossings* has inspired a new generation of historians interested in the transnational flow of people and ideas. This roundtable has traced that influence in a number of subfields, from intellectual history and labor history to the history of capitalism. As Amy points out, intellectual historians such as Leslie Butler and Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen have built on Rodgers by revealing the circulation of philosophical ideas across the Atlantic and across national boundaries. Adam notes, furthermore, that labor historians, such as Leon Fink, expand on Rodgers's study of moderate reformers by giving more attention to American labor radicals, while

using Rodgers's transnational frame. And, as Noam observes, within the scholarship on the history of capitalism, we see new attention to transnational studies since the publication of *Atlantic Crossings*, including the work of Sven Beckert and Walter Johnson. This scholarship, for example, repositions the U.S. South as the center of the Atlantic economy. In each of these historical subfields, Rodgers's transnational method has been just as influential as his historical findings. Fascinated by the social "webs" and "networks" that transcend national boundaries, Rodgers's work has influenced a broad range of transnational historical scholarship in both the Pacific and Atlantic worlds.[78]

But if *Atlantic Crossings* illuminated the webs of intellectuals and reformers working for progressive political change, newer scholarship, particularly work focused on U.S. empire, has shown how these same networks worked to advance imperialism and deepen racial hierarchies.[79] As Amy, Adam, and Noam all rightly point out, the history of colonialism and racism that loomed over the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was one very important omission in *Atlantic Crossings* that later scholars sought to address.

Take, for example, the Verein für Sozialpolitik (Social Policy Association), which was founded by German economists in 1872 and published 143 volumes investigating a range of social problems from urban housing to rural agriculture. Rodgers points repeatedly to the work of the Verein in *Atlantic Crossings*, showing how its members criticized laissez-faire policies as nothing more than pro-business "Manchester economics," and worked to establish an empirical basis for a more socially active state that would promote the public good.[80] Rodgers quotes the Verein's founding document: "We are convinced that the unchecked reign of partially antagonistic and unequal individual interests cannot guarantee the common welfare."[81] Rodgers shows how such progressive ideas circulated from Berlin to Philadelphia and back again. Yet, in Angela Zimmerman's *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South*, the political commitments of the Verein für Sozialpolitik take on a decidedly different cast. Zimmerman shows the Verein supporting authoritarian and exploitative policies, even over the strenuous objections of fellow members who saw such commitments as being at odds with their notion of the "public good." For instance, Verein leaders Gustav Schmoller and Georg Friedrich Knapp studied the post-Civil War U.S. South in order to learn techniques for using racism to control labor. As part of their research into internal colonization in the German context in the 1890s, the Verein members explored methods of "refining labor contracts as instruments of coercion."[82] Zimmerman demonstrates that a turning point occurred when Max Weber, the most famous Verein member and a foundational figure in sociology, argued in an 1892 paper that the liberation of Polish serfs in Eastern Prussia had generated a racial problem for Germany. Weber argued that Polish free labor's threat to German culture could be solved by promoting anti-Polish racism in the Prussian East.[83] W. E. B. Du Bois, then a doctoral student in Berlin and a fellow member of the Verein, never accepted Weber's anti-Polish racism, according to Zimmerman.[84]

As Noam suggests earlier in this forum, transatlantic networks could be "the wellspring of, not progressive change and relaxation of nationalist narrow-mindedness, but of exploitation, violence, and dispossession." Paul Kramer has directly addressed Rodgers's omission of colonialism by showing how capitalism created the conditions for networks of both social reformers and empire builders, many of whom inhabited the same social milieu. "The factors that encouraged the overlap of empires," Kramer writes, "were similar to those linking together the contemporary 'Atlantic crossings' of welfare state ideas and institutions."[85] *Atlantic Crossings* remains a profound contribution to the

historiography twenty-five years later precisely because historians continue to employ Rodgers's transnational methods even as they debate his conclusions. As Michael Katz wrote in 1999, "It is a measure of Rodgers' great accomplishments that he has written a book that historians not only admire but with which they will want to contend."[86]

Notes

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